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**THE DAWN  
WALL GOES  
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**TOMMY  
CALDWELL  
AND KEVIN  
JORGESON  
MAKE  
HISTORY**

MARCH 2015





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# CONTENTS ISSUE 333



## 6 FLASH

### THE APPROACH

#### 17 Editor's Note

#### 18 Letters

#### 19 Re-Gram

Our readers' best whipper photos.

#### 20 Dawn Wall

A primer on the historic first free ascent.

#### 23 Unbelayvable

### THE CLIMB

#### GUIDE

#### 26 Advice

How Dave Allfrey made it through seven El Cap routes in seven days.

#### 28 Epicenter

Las Vegas offers more than just gambling, buffets, and regret.

#### 34 Instant Expert

Heel hook your way through the grades with these pro tips.

#### 36 Training

Climbing gym games to keep psych high and workouts fun.

#### 38 Nutrition

Pasta can be fuel for adventure, not just waist-expanding comfort food.

### GEAR

#### 41 Primer

Follow these hangboard do's and don'ts for injury-free strength.

#### 42 Big Review

Five hangboards tailored to any skill level and wall space.

#### 44 Tested

The latest gear obsessions from our testers.

#### 45 The Kit

Add class to your post-send celebration with these six backcountry bartending tools.

### CLINICS

#### 46 Begin Here

Nail those hard-to-reach clips with a few tricks.

#### 48 In Session

Never struggle with big pro again thanks to this how-to guide.

#### 50 Health

Simple putty exercises to strengthen overlooked finger muscles.

### VOICES

#### 53 Ask Answer Man

Why are boy climbers so oversexed?

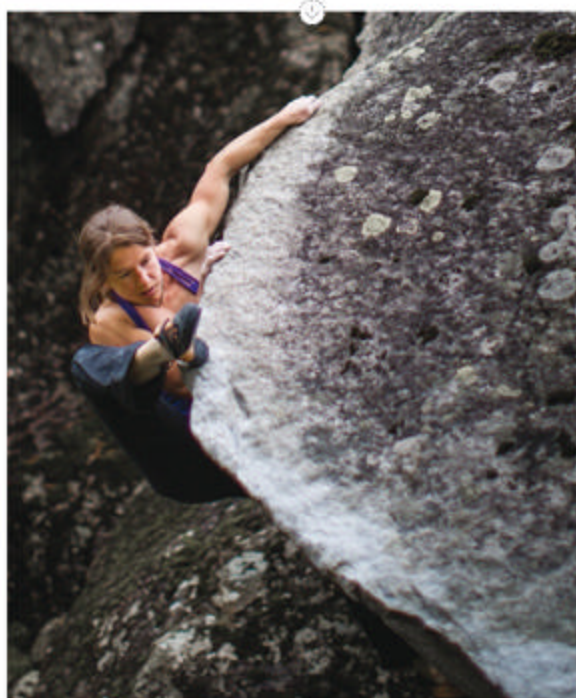
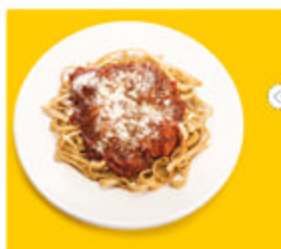
#### 54 The Wright Stuff

Pro climber Cedar Wright breaks ice climbing's one rule.

#### 56 Semi-Rad

Brendan Leonard still has good fun on "bad" routes.

### 88 THE FLOW





## 60 The Alpine Pursuit of 5 Fun

Sometimes pricey climbing expeditions involve way less climbing than the participants might like—and that's completely OK. **Brendan Leonard** learns this lesson the "easy" way, instead spending time with friends in beautifully rustic huts nestled at the foot of granite-tooth spires in a postcard-perfect setting.


## 72 The Way of the Turtle

What's the last thing any veteran big waller would want on a first ascent expedition to the soaring walls of Baffin Island? A partner with no experience. But **Mike Libeck** has always marched to the beat of his own drum, and it was no different when he took a first-timer to this remote granite heaven in northeastern Canada.

## 80 Keystone State of Mind

When you think of the country's top bouldering destinations, it's pretty safe to say that Pennsylvania doesn't make the short list. But with its ample problems, strong sense of backcountry adventure, short approaches, friendly locals, and first ascent potential, author and local **Seth Derr** would like to change your mind.





Alex Megos climbs *Bongo Fury* aka *Frank Zappa Memorial Buttress* (5.12b) at Joe's Garage, Owens River Gorge, during a whirlwind trip to Bishop, California, and Red Rock, Nevada.





## FIND A GUIDE

## BECOME ONE

# Climbing

LEADING SINCE 1970

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# ROCA ROPES





## Conrad Anker

*West Ridge (5.4), Pigeon Spire  
Bugaboos, Canada*

Although the life of a professional climber may look like one rad expedition after the next to cool places with awesome people, it's actually quite rare for the most elite to be able to go on "a fun trip with friends," which is how legendary mountaineer Conrad Anker described this excursion to the Bugaboos in the Great White North. Anker, Alex Honnold, Jimmy Chin, and Renan Ozturk headed to this well-known spot in British Columbia to celebrate a few milestones and move on some rock, climbing the ultra-classic *Beckey-Chouinard* (5.10) on South Howser Tower and a few other routes nearby. They commemorated Honnold turning 28, Chin's last big trip before his daughter, Marina, was born, and a reunion of the Meru team, which included Ozturk, Chin, and Anker. The trio successfully summited the Himalayan peak via the *Shark's Fin* in 2011 after a few attempts by each climber.




JIMMY CHIN / THE NORTH FACE








A wide-angle photograph of a massive, light-brown rock face. A climber in a green shirt and black pants is visible on the left side of the frame, high up on the rock. Several ropes and cables are visible, crisscrossing the rock face. The texture of the rock is rough and uneven, with many cracks and crevices.

Kevin Jorgeson climbs his nemesis, the 90-foot pitch 15 (5.14d), where the razor-sharp holds gave his bloodied tips a run for their money.

A photograph of two men standing on a rocky ledge, smiling at the camera. The man on the left is wearing a bright green jacket and has his arm around the shoulder of the man on the right. The man on the right is wearing a yellow puffy jacket and a black beanie with green accents. In the background, a vast mountain landscape is visible, with steep, rocky slopes and a valley below. The lighting suggests it's either early morning or late afternoon, with long shadows and a warm glow.

Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson celebrate on the summit of El Cap after completing the Dawn Wall on January 14.







## Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson

Dawn Wall (5.14+), El Cap, Yosemite, California

At this point if you're a climber and you haven't heard of the Dawn Wall, you've been living under a rock—no pun intended—for several years. In 2007, Tommy Caldwell began exploring the southeast face of El Cap to look for free-climbing potential (several aid routes already existed). When he finally found a line he thought would go, he realized it was so difficult that he would need a top-tier partner. Native Californian Kevin Jorgeson joined him in 2009 and has been his most committed partner, among a list of serious professionals that includes Chris Sharma, Alex Honnold, and Jonathan Siegrist. The team has returned year after year (Jorgeson took two years off) to work all 32

itches, seven of which are 5.14 and 12 of which are 5.13. This year they finally finished the mega project on January 14, summing at 3:30 p.m. PST, after 19 days on the wall. While Caldwell's ascent was relatively smooth, Jorgeson was nearly thwarted by pitch 15 (5.14d) due to split tips and the resulting finger tape that prevented him from grabbing the razor-thin holds. He pulled through on his seventh day of attempts and made a dramatic comeback to summit the wall with Caldwell in fine style.

 TOM EVANS /  
ADIDAS OUTDOOR

 CHRIS BURKARD /  
PATAGONIA (BOTTOM LEFT)



Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson prepare for a big day ahead at what they deemed "Basecamp," located on a ledge directly below the pitch 14 anchors.



Crowds watch anxiously from El Cap Meadow. Thousands also tuned into a live-stream for the last few days of the climb.





## Will Gadd

Mount Kilimanjaro  
Tanzania, Africa

For most people, “climbing” 19,341-foot Mount Kilimanjaro in Tanzania on the southeastern coast of Africa means a weeks-long slog with heavy packs, porters, and days of acclimatization, similar to Everest without the incredibly cold weather and the last 9,700 feet of altitude gain. The top of a volcano in Africa might be the last place you’d expect to find incredible ice climbing, but leave it to Canadian ice and mixed climbing badass Will Gadd to spearhead an expedition with the sole purpose of climbing the fast-disappearing frozen stuff in the summit crater at 19,000 feet. He’s on a mission to climb ice on all seven continents, and he had to get on it quickly because more than 90% of the ice on Kili has melted in the last 100 years, and research suggests it might all be gone by 2020. Gadd says, “The ice I climbed was literally disappearing in front of my eyes. None of what I climbed will survive another month.” The very high altitude combined with a super-hot, tropical sun creates crazy formations like this ice fin that pokes out of sand. “The biggest challenge was acclimating to that altitude in a few days and not overexerting ourselves,” photographer Christian Pondella says. “This trip was all about surreal juxtapositions. Moments before this photo it was clear blue skies and desert-like heat as we were walking in the sand with bare feet. Then instantly the clouds and fog rolled in, and it started to snow.”



CHRISTIAN PONDELLA /  
RED BULL CONTENT POOL









**Alex Megos**

*Bongo Fury* (5.12b),  
Owens River Gorge (this page)  
*The Swarm* (V13/14),  
Bishop, California

This 21-year-old from Erlangen, Germany, has become known as the king of quick sends, including the first-ever onsight of a 5.14d (*Estado Critico* in Siurana, Spain), and it was no different when he came to the States in November 2014. True *wunderkind* Alex Megos dispatched *The Swarm* (V13/14), *Mandala Sit Start* (V14), and the *Buttermilker* (V13) faster than it would take most elite climbers to do one problem, saying, "I sent all of them relatively quick, spending about two short sessions on each problem." He had visited Bishop the year before, sending what he calls the "easier classic problems," including the stand start to the *Mandala* (V12), the highball *Evolution* (V11), and an impressive flash of *Blood Meridian* (V12/13). Continuing his 2014 sendfest, Megos visited nearby Owens River Gorge and then Red Rock, Nevada, with *Meadowlark Lemon* (V14) and *Clockwork Orange* (V12/13) in his sights. The first session on *Meadowlark* was a "catastrophe," he says. "Basically I tried to get my second foot off the ground the whole session." He left for a few days, came back, and some visiting climbing partners got him psyched again, so he sent the stand start (V13), then came back the next day to send the sit start. When he moved on to *Clockwork*, which he also struggled on during that first catastrophic session, he found that he could easily hold the crux's strange pocket (FYI, this was after doing an all-day multi-pitch route), and he sent it third go. He sums up his experience: "That's when I figured it out—bouldering is strange."



ANDREW BURR (2)









## Heather Weidner

*The Great Red Roof (5.13b), Red Rock, Nevada*

"When I was in school and working as a veterinarian, I was just climbing on the weekends, so I put time and energy into projecting difficult sport routes," pro Heather Weidner says of her switch from focusing on hard sport sends to ticking elite trad lines. "Now that I'm climbing full-time, I want to be a more well-rounded climber." And when you've redpointed up to 5.14b sport, 5.13 trad isn't far out of your reach. Weidner wanted a challenge, and a few friends recommended *The Great Red Roof*. Reminiscent of *Separate Reality* (5.12a) in Yosemite, this short but burly line climbs out from a protected cove on a 30-foot horizontal roof, with the last 10 feet involving no-feet camping moves, at which point the exposure becomes

"super intimidating." Weidner and her husband, climber and writer Chris Weidner, checked it out in spring 2014 and "got our butts kicked." They couldn't figure out most of the moves, but they came back this winter with a new resolve to take the time to unlock the beta. Over the course of five days and 11 attempts, she was able to redpoint it while placing gear, for likely the female first ascent (records are scarce so this is unconfirmed). What's next for Heather? "I just climbed ice for the first time a few weeks ago with Chris and had a blast! I'm excited to see what I can do with trad, and who knows, maybe some big walls are in my future..."



JON GLASSBERG





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*A shoo-in for the most impressive trip to Bishop in recent history. Alex Megos puts another one in the bag and moves on. California. **KEN ETZEL***

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Mt. Olympus 2013. Michelle Miller photo



# THE APPROACH

Kevin Jorgeson works the crux pitch 15 on his historic ascent of the Dawn Wall with Tommy Caldwell.

## EDITOR'S NOTE

# The Dawning

BY SHANNON DAVIS

➔ A few days ago, my grandma asked me what free climbing was. Wait, what? Grandma Norma just said *free climbing*? “Those guys are crazy,” she added, before I could craft a reply suitable for someone who knows 1,000 times more about baking cookies than climbing rocks. “That’s not what you do is it, Shan?”

Like many people in the past month, she was exposed to the term for the first time in the barrage of media coverage surrounding *those guys*—Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson—whose 19 days on El Cap’s Dawn Wall captivated the nation in January.

Their historic send of what is now the hardest big wall climb in the world was covered blow by blow (and often unintentionally hilariously) by *The New York Times*. NPR aired a phone interview from the climbers’ portaledge. The final four pitches of the climb were streamed live by NBC. After topping out, the two were featured on ESPN’s *SportsCenter* and made the front page of every major U.S. newspaper. Even the White House tweeted a shot of Obama giving a thumbs-up in front of a painting of El Cap, saying: “So proud of Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson for conquering El Capitan. You remind us that anything is possible. -BO” If for a moment, climbing was America’s sport.

As a climber, I’m speechless at the accomplishment. Thirty-two pitches, 19 of them rated 5.13 or higher. Seven years of effort, failure, training, and unwavering focus and belief. But I’m even more psyched to see their achievement spread the gospel of climbing to a wider audience and inspire tomorrow’s crushers. What’s your Dawn Wall?

## CONTRIBUTORS



### MIKE LIBECKI

This Utahn has completed more than 50 expeditions to the coldest and most remote landscapes the planet has to offer,

and his goal is to tick 100 total before he turns 100 years old (he’s 41). He’s also a dedicated father to an 11-year-old daughter and avid dispenser of climber wisdom like, “Why ration passion? Dream big and climb those dreams.” Who better to take a big wall apprenticeship with? (“The Way of the Turtle,” p. 72)



### SETH DERR

Think “Pennsylvania climbing” is an oxymoron? In “Keystone State of Mind,” (p. 80) Seth Derr, a 36-year-old boulderer from Harrisburg, says think again. And we

have to say, his argument is pretty damn compelling. Not only are there more than 25 bouldering areas with “several thousand problems,” there are few crowds and huge potential for more development. But the kicker might be the variety of rock types, from gritstone to diabase.



### DAVID ALLFREY

Allfrey, born and raised in California and currently living in Las Vegas, learned to climb in the Sierra Nevada

and will always think of Yosemite as a second home. He’s climbed 30 different routes on El Capitan, with almost 50 ascents total, and he considers himself a jack-of-all-trades type of climber. In his first story for *Climbing*, he writes about about his biggest week of climbing how to prepare for huge objectives (p. 26).



## UNSOLICITED BETA

### THE UNFAIRER SEX

I was excited to see your “comprehensive” list of books about climbing and its history in your December issue (“Doctor of Climbing”). Sadly, I wasn’t surprised it excluded almost all books written by and about women. If you read any memoirs of female climbers, you’d note that they routinely feel excluded from the past, present, and future of the sport. I hope to see you take this as an opportunity to rethink ingrained processes about how climbing is covered by media. Twenty years after Lynn Hill completed the first free ascent of the *Nose*, it’s about damn time.

—Renee McGarry, Brooklyn, New York

**Ed. Note:** We didn’t claim our list to be comprehensive, rather “imperfect, unscientific,” and we invite anyone and everyone to add to the discussion with their picks at [climbing.com/climbingology](http://climbing.com/climbingology).

### TO FUTURE PLANS

Being a few weeks shy of turning 62, I no longer sleep as well as I used to. Last night, while lying in bed thinking about climbing, I had this epiphany: You know you’re old when you get more excitement from thinking about past experiences than you do thinking about future plans. As for me, I’m not quite there yet. Thanks for inspir-

ing new adventures to look forward to late at night with each new issue.

—Michael Paul, Steamboat Springs, Colorado

### DEAR ANSWER MAN

I am deeply offended and hurt by your unwarranted attack on teenage girls in the February 2015 issue. I literally just walked through the door after a long day of screaming at my mother (because she insisted I buy size 4 pants, rather than size 2) and passive-aggressively posting embarrassing pictures of my best friend (I’m positive she’s talking about me behind my back). So I literally ran to my fresh issue of *Climbing* and turned to my favorite sarcastic advice columnist. Little did I know I was reading my way into an ambush! Teenage girls (and especially teenage girls who climb) are anything but the way you described. I expect a full apology, and a deluxe limo sent over for prom.

—Maria P., Orlando, Florida

**Answer Man responds:** I’ll totally take you to prom. That’s what you’re asking me right? This lecherous old man doesn’t have a limo, but he does have a Honda with the lingering odor of his friends’ forgotten cigarettes, sweaty sleepless nights after pounding whiskey, and climbing shoes. Hope that will do.

## KEEP IN TOUCH



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## CONSENSUS

### Do you wear a helmet when climbing routes?

Yes

76%

Head injuries account for 12.2% of all climbing injuries, with lacerations being the most common.

## ARCHIVES



### The Dawn Wall's First (Not Free) Ascent

The Dawn Wall is all over the news this year, just as it was when Warren Harding and Dean Caldwell climbed it during our inaugural year of 1970. Here's some of our coverage from the original ascent.

*In early 1970, a free ascent of the Dawn Wall was unthinkable. At the time, Valley legends were beginning to think that even an aid ascent wasn't possible. The following paragraph comes from Climbing's Basecamp section, which chronicled major climbs of the day, in issue No. 2.*

Kim Schmitz and Jim Bridwell reached the high point of previous attempts—one pitch above El Cap Tower—on the “Wall of Early Morning Light” and came to the same conclusion as the previous parties. There are no cracks in the nebulous folds on the upper wall. They descended on the third day.

*Today's star big wallers climb alongside camera crews and have regular resupplies. Things were a little different back in the day, as demonstrated by this account of the Dawn Wall's first ascent in the Basecamp section of issue No. 5.*

The steepest long big wall aid climb in the world was completed Nov. 18 by Warren Harding and Dean Caldwell in Yosemite National Park. The route certainly was the hardest technical ascent accomplished in Yosemite, with many hundreds of both pitons and bolt dowels placed for direct aid over extremely blank areas between the widely separated crack systems. The total time spent on the ascent was 28 days of sustained climbing with most nights spent in battent hammocks. Their 21 days of food and water had run completely out long before they reached the summit, which sapped their strength and greatly slowed the climb of the final overhang. They revived remarkably on champagne brought to the summit by climbers and girlfriends.

*Following the first ascent of the Dawn Wall, photographer Galen Rowell lamented that there was nothing left to achieve in the Valley in a melodramatic essay titled “An Elegy for Yosemite” in issue No. 7.*

Now there are no unclimbed walls in Yosemite waiting to test the increased standards of future generations. The remaining virgin walls are the old maids of the Valley, which are far less desirable than the existing classics. Somewhere in the mid-1960s, Yosemite climbing reached its apex, and although new routes have been made which individually stretch the standards of every type of climbing, there are no grand faces awaiting an unborn generation. Future climbers will face a scarred granite pegboard in a well-used, outdoor gymnasium.



## OVERHEARD

### Special Dawn Wall Edition

"An earlier version of this article misstated the name of the country whose army chased Tommy Caldwell's kidnappers. As the article correctly noted elsewhere, Caldwell was in Kyrgyzstan, not Kyrzбекistan, which does not exist."

—The New York Times corrects a bio of Tommy Caldwell, after inventing a new country.

"Tom Evans and Kevin Jorgeson are the first climbers to try to reach the summit of El Capitan in California's Yosemite National Park using just their hands and feet."

—The completely inaccurate bio generated by Google when searching for Kevin Jorgeson. For the real story, turn the page.

"The supply team headed back up for a resupply of some really necessary items, like recharged batteries and whiskey, the latter of which had fallen to a critically low level."

—Tom Evans of El Cap Report (elcapreport.com) outlines a critical resupply during day 15 of the Dawn Wall push.

## RE-GRAM

# #Whippers

Sometimes in climbing, you will be above a bolt or a piece of gear, you will go for it, and it will not work out. There's only one thing you can do in this situation, and that's to fall, because that's how gravity works. You may or may not let out an involuntary and embarrassing high-pitched scream. And you will definitely plummet toward the Earth at  $9.8 \text{ m/s}^2$ . This is known as taking a whipper. Love them or hate them, there's one thing we can all agree on: It sure is fun to watch someone else do it. Here are a few of our readers catching air.



Gary Kanner got a whipper for his birthday on *Amarillo Sunset* (5.11b) at the Red River Gorge.

@nick\_morales



An onsight attempt of *Special Forces* (5.11a) at Skaha. Ironically, the photographer onsighted it first.

@DannyIsrael



Nat Gustafson takes flight at the upper crux of *Goliath* (5.13a), a stunning 110-foot overhanging arête up the tallest part of the Enchanted Tower in New Mexico.

@Jason\_Halladay



Tracey Hua takes a screaming whip mid-crux on the mega classic and steep *The Way of All Flesh* (5.12c), Blue Mountains, Australia. Photo: Eugene Mak (@eugmak).

@ausrockhugger



Having just sent my project, I thought a victory whipper seemed like the obvious way to celebrate, but I wasn't expecting this much slack. Photo: Tom Bush.

@danfisher92



# Dawn Wall Primer

BY KEVIN CORRIGAN

## THE PLAYERS

**Tommy Caldwell - 36** - An extremely accomplished climber, Caldwell has established routes up to 5.15a. He's claimed a number of first free ascents on Yosemite big walls. And he's one of only five people to have free climbed the *Nose*. He lives with his wife and young son in Estes Park, Colorado.

**Kevin Jorgeson - 30** - First came to prominence as a youth competition climber, but quit competitions at age 18 to focus on bouldering. Since then has finished a number of V14 problems. Also cofounded Pro Climbers International, with the goal of supporting this generation of climbers and nurturing the next. Lives in Santa Rosa, California. Was not a big wall climber before the Dawn Wall project. Jorgeson joined Caldwell in 2009, and has been his primary partner since then.

## THE WALL

The Dawn Wall, aka the Wall of Early Morning Light, on El Capitan, so named because it's the first face of El Cap to receive sunlight in the morning. The wall was first climbed by Valley legends Warren Harding and Dean Caldwell in 1970. They aided their way up over 28 days, famously refusing rescue when park officials began to fear for their well-being. They offered their would-be rescuers a drink of wine.

## FIRST LIGHT

According to filmmaker Brett Lowell, Tommy Caldwell first started thinking about the Dawn Wall in fall 2007. At the time, he wasn't sure if it was possible. They decided to include it in Lowell's film "Progression" anyway, hoping it might inspire someone else. Lo and behold, Kevin Jorgeson saw the film and was so struck by the quest that he emailed Caldwell to ask if he wanted a partner. He did.

## POINTS OF INTEREST

**Pitch 15** - Kevin Jorgeson's crux. Split tips and finger tape initially prevented him from holding the razor-thin holds, but after 11 redpoint attempts over seven days, he conquered his nemesis pitch.

**Pitch 16** - The would-be crux for Tommy Caldwell. He recreated the massive horizontal dyno with plastic holds on his barn to practice. It involves jumping eight feet from a decent crimp to a slanting 1.5-pad incut rail that faces the wrong way. Ultimately, he decided to circumvent it altogether by downclimbing half a rope length below the move, then back up around it. This was dubbed the Loop Pitch, and it still comes in at a very hard 5.14a (including 5.13/5.14 downclimbing).



**Wino Tower** - From this symbolic ledge, the climb becomes significantly "easier." The 5.14 and 5.13 pitches are done, and the rest of the route is mostly 5.11/5.12 climbing (spare one 5.13a boulder problem near the top). According to wife Becca Caldwell, Tommy had tears in his eyes upon reaching this point because he believed that if he could make it here, the Dawn Wall would be possible.

## GIMME FRICTION

The pair have attributed part of this season's success to colder temperatures, deciding to make the push later into winter than ever before. They've also done much of the climbing at night, to avoid the sun. Climbing shoe rubber produces the most friction from 32 to 41°F, which is also the ideal temperature for skin, as it's just cold enough to prevent sweating. To learn more friction facts, visit [climbing.com/frictionscience](http://climbing.com/frictionscience).

## DESPERATE MEASURES

Skin condition is such an important factor in the climb that Tommy Caldwell claims to have set an alarm for every four hours at night to reapply skin salve.

## MAJOR INJURIES

**2011** - Jorgeson suffered bruised bones and stretched and compressed ligaments in his ankle attempting the dyno on pitch 16, effectively ending his season.

**2013** - Caldwell tore rib cartilage when a haulbag took a 200-foot fall while tied to his harness, forcing him to take several months off.

Go to [climbing.com/dawnwall](http://climbing.com/dawnwall) for more.

## By the Numbers

**2,900** ▶ Height of El Capitan in feet.

**32** ▶ Pitches on the Dawn Wall.

**2010** ▶ First year Caldwell and Jorgeson made a ground-up attempt.

**1** ▶ Shoes designed. Tommy Caldwell mod-

eled the La Sportiva TC Pro for his specific needs on this mega-project.

**14** ▶ Slight hand and foot moves required to

complete the crux of pitch 15, all while holding the sharpest holds of the wall at full arm extension.

**8'5"** ▶ Length of

the sideways dyno on pitch 16.

**19.5** ▶ Fingers Caldwell and Jorgeson have between them. Caldwell severed his

left index finger with a table saw in 2001.

**1** ▶ Routes Kevin Jorgeson has climbed on El Capitan, the one being Dawn Wall.



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## OFF THE WALL

# Big Fun on Big Walls With Jacob Cook

BY KEVIN CORRIGAN

WHEN MOST PEOPLE think of big wall climbing, they probably think of long days, uncomfortable bivvies, complicated systems, and grueling gear hauls. Big wall climbing can be all those things, but it can also be fun and a bit ridiculous. English climber Jacob Cook proved just that on a recent road trip to France's Verdon Gorge. Over six days he and partner Ian Cooper made the first continuous ascent of *El Topo* (5.13a), a 1,000-foot, 14-pitch face. In between good climbing temps, Jacob and Ian threw a Hawaiian luau.



Cook (right) and Cooper having more fun than most big wallers.

### How did the idea for *El Topo* come about?

A lot of people go to bed with a novel; I go to bed with a guidebook. I knew about *El Topo* for a few years and always thought it looked like an amazing objective. No one had done a continuous free ascent. I'd just been in Yosemite, where I learned a whole lot of big wall techniques. Then Ian—who is an absolute character, he's not like other people—and I decided that it was as important for us to have a really fun time up there as it was to climb the route. I'm definitely someone that climbs more for the experiences than for the sport aspect.

### Did you need to do the route in big wall style?

I think one of the reasons it hadn't had a continuous free ascent is because people don't go big walling in the Verdon. People in the campsite were like, "What are you guys doing? Why are you doing this?" Because it's not that big. The route is only like 300 meters. I think a lot of people had it in their heads that it had to be a one-day kind of thing. For us that wasn't a possibility. We were trying it in the middle of summer, and the wall is in the sun until 2 p.m. It can be 95° up there, and you're climbing blank gray slabs. I can't climb 13a slab in that kind of heat. There's just no chance. So given that our climbing window was six hours long, there's no way we could climb it in a day. It's 14 pitches. Also, I just liked the idea of spending a while up there.

### Had you slept in a portaledge before?

No. I'd done the *Nose* with my girlfriend, but we slept on natural ledges. It was my first time sleeping in a portaledge. We spent a long time trying to set it up. We'd done it once before in a park in London. Then our second time was at a hanging belay, five pitches up *El Topo*, in the dark. It took us quite a while. And then I remember sitting in it like, "Is it supposed to be this wobbly?" It was moving around a whole bunch. But it was nice. It was cozy. We had speakers and a playlist that started with a song called "It's a Reggae Morning" so every morning was a reggae morning on the ledge.

### How did the idea for the Hawaiian party come about?

We decided to have a Hawaiian party up there because it was gonna be really, really hot. We needed something to do during the day when we weren't able to climb. It kind of, uh, snowballed. We originally decided to have an umbrella that we would sit under during the day, and then sitting under an umbrella kind of felt like being on a beach, like a tropical island somewhere. Then I was like, "Oh, we should get hula skirts!" And we went on Amazon and eventually were like, "Oh, we can get this! And this! And these toucan sunglasses, and little cocktail umbrellas...." And we ended up buying a whole load of things. It definitely weighed the haulbag down. Significantly. But it was worth it.

### What exactly did you haul up?

In the haulbag we had a water section, a sleeping-gear section, a food section, and the party section. In the party section we had a hula skirt, a whole pack of plastic martini glasses—which kept getting broken so it was good we had a bunch of them—little cocktail umbrellas, some toucan sunglasses, and, of course, we had an inflatable palm tree. That was a crucial thing. For belay ambience, we'd get the inflatable palm tree out.

### Any advice for other climbers that want to get the most fun out of portaledge life?

Your time on the wall is what you're gonna remember. When you look back, you're not going to think, "Oh, I succeeded on this climb." Even if you fail on the climb and have a great time doing it, it's a much better memory than if you got to the top and you hadn't slept for 48 hours and ran out of water. I think it's worth taking the extra stuff to have a good time. And if you're having a party, tunes are essential. Our little speakers were pretty key.

Read about this and more of Jacob's adventures on his blog at [jacobclimbsthings.blogspot.com](http://jacobclimbsthings.blogspot.com).



## UNBELAYVABLE!

## Scary (and true) tales from a crag near you

I saw an inexperienced belayer take out her phone and take selfies for two full minutes. Soon enough, a man approached and informed her that she needed to put her phone away to give her friend a proper belay. She argued that her friend was a good climber and wouldn't fall, and that even if she did fall, she had good reflexes and could catch the rope in time. She told him in no uncertain terms that her belay habits were none of his business.

—Maria P., via *Climbing.com*

**LESSON:** A good belayer should always pay attention to her climber and always keep her hand on the brake strand. A good belayer should never take selfies, no matter how cute they look. Climbing falls can happen suddenly and be beyond the climber's control. With a tube-style belay device, a rope not held in the brake position will begin pulling through the device immediately. Even if you do manage to grab it and arrest the fall, you'll likely suffer some nasty rope burn in the process.

We saw a climber being "assisted" through the crux of the highball *Heavenly Path* (V1) in Bishop, California. She used a guy's legs as handholds to pull herself onto the delicate slab toward the top. He was hanging below the lip in order to assist her. Before that part it would've been an easy downclimb. After, she found herself in a committed position from which a fall would have been dangerous. And, once again, she was unable to climb it. She had to continue climbing the guy to reach the top.

—Denise Tucker, via email

**LESSON:** There are situations where it's OK to use artificial means (usually pulling on draws or trad gear) to skip a difficult section of a climb. Highball bouldering is not one of them. If you can't finish a tall problem, just quit and downclimb! Don't lug yourself to higher, more dangerous heights. And don't yank on people above you. A big fall is dangerous enough without another climber taking the same fall and landing on top of you.

See something unbelayvable?

Email [unbelayvable@climbing.com](mailto:unbelayvable@climbing.com).



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To see the entire 2015 line of LOWA Boots, visit [www.lowaboos.com](http://www.lowaboos.com)







Salt Lake City climber Jewell Lund keeps it cool on *Triassic Sands* (5.10) in the climber heaven of Red Rock, just a short drive from the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas. Turn to page 28 to read about the eons of climbing the Sin City region has to offer, and then get ready for the area's infinite bouldering with a tune-up on heel hooking from the master herself: pro climber Nina Williams. Augment Vegas' pricey and less-than-nutritious buffets with a tasty recipe that's ideal for fueling and recovery on page 38. Also in this issue: hand and finger rehab exercises, expert tips on dealing with large cams and Big Bros, and climbing games that keep training fun.

26 **GUIDE** // 41 **GEAR** // 46 **CLINICS** // 53 **VOICES**

# THE C





# LIMB



Belayed by Alex Honnold, Dave Allfrey climbs through the pain on the 1,800-foot *Zodiac* (VI 5.13a C3). Although this route was relatively easy in comparison to the other lines completed during their "7 in 7" project, it was climbed on the second-to-last day with a speedy time of 5 hours, 5 minutes. All in all, the team climbed 173 guidebook pitches in one week.





# Big Time

BY DAVID ALLFREY

Climbing seven Yosemite big walls in seven days



I LOOKED UP the rope to the anchor above, which I was lowering myself away from. I was out of rope and still far from being where I needed to be. Alex had climbed almost the entire pitch without any gear, a typical situation. He glanced down and saw me hesitate. “The swing is clean; just go for it!” he shouted. I let go of the rope, and a guttural yell escaped my throat as I swung along the wall, covering nearly 100 lateral feet. My feet touched the stone, and I motored my legs like I was in the Flintstones car. I hit the apex of the swing, then turned and ran the other way until the momentum died. I let out a loud whoop of excitement. Despite being exhausted, we were still having fun on our sixth route on El Capitan in six days, and we still had one more day to go for our goal of seven routes in seven days.

We were about 45 minutes into the free-climbing start to *Zodiac*, nearly 500 feet up the route. It was June 7, swelteringly hot and day six of our week-long adventure on El Capitan in Yosemite, the “7 in 7” as we were calling it. Six days earlier, we had started the whole event on *New Jersey Turnpike* with the El Niño start (VI 5.13b A4), reorganized our gear on the summit, descended, and drove to El Portal to sleep. We woke up at 4 a.m. the next day and climbed *Tangerine Trip* (VI 5.9 C3). We repeated this

process again and again on *Eagles Way* (VI 5.9 A3+), the *Nose* (VI 5.9 C2), *Lurking Fear* (VI 5.9 A2), and now *Zodiac* (VI 5.13a C3). The next day we would finish out the week on *Triple Direct* (VI 5.9 C2)—a lifetime of climbing for some packed into just one week.

I first heard about the 7 in 7 idea in 2007 from Ammon McNeely and the late Brian McCray. They had thought up the idea during their down time while working as riggers in Las Vegas. They would hang out in the ceiling and think of ideas for brutal big wall pushes and heinous link-ups. When Ammon mentioned it to me, he seemed to ponder how possible it was; I just laughed and questioned his sanity. At the time, I had never even imagined climbing El Cap, and it would still be two more years before that happened.

So seven years after I was first given the idea of the 7 in 7 by one of my climbing heroes, Alex Honnold and I had set out to make it happen. We used our unique skill sets: Alex’s insane ability to free climb and my knowledge of aid climbing. We had challenged ourselves on several objectives together over the last two years: *Lunar Eclipse*, the *West Buttress*, and most recently, the infamous *Excalibur*. As we hiked off the summit after our 16 hour, 10 minute first one-day ascent of *Excalibur* (aka “the alligator route”), I told Alex about the 7 in 7 idea. He smiled, his eyes lit up, and our next adventure began.

What I see now is that Ammon’s idea was about a lot more than just climbing seven routes. It was about attacking an impossible feat and finding out where your limits are: how far, how fast, and how big you can go—a challenging idea to create adventure. We were playing a game to bring some adventure and unknown back into climbing on a cliff where most climbers know that if they have the gear and suffer for enough days, they will arrive at the summit. So we assaulted the wall, one pitch at a time, one day at a time, for seven days, in search of our breaking point and a new level of challenge.

## What I Learned About Tackling Big Objectives



### TRAINING

I started training four months prior to the objective by mimicking the overall fitness necessary for really big days—climbing, running, hiking, and even weightlifting. For some goals, it might involve hitting the climbing gym three days a week or adding some bouldering into your regular routine in order to send a project. Start early and stay focused.



### HYDRATING

Whenever you are going to do multiple days of intense activity, you need to make sure you are on top of hydration. Drink early and often. I use drink additives like Nuun, Clif Shot, or Cytomax to replenish salts lost while pushing myself all day. Drink through the day, and start rehydrating in earnest as soon as you finish your activity.



### ICING

This is a horrible task—painful and just really unpleasant—but it works. When regularly beating up your body, there’s very little else you can do to help speed up recovery more than icing. We used the cold Merced River and soaked our hands, arms, and legs starting on the fourth day. Both Alex and I felt marked improvements the next morning.



### STREAMLINING

Figure out what gear you actually need and what gear you probably don’t, then pare your kit so that you aren’t hauling up the kitchen sink. You’ll speed everything up substantially by lightening your load. We saved time by simplifying our anchors: Two lockers and a bunny ears figure eight make a much quicker anchor than a 12-foot cordelette.



### STAYING PSYCHED

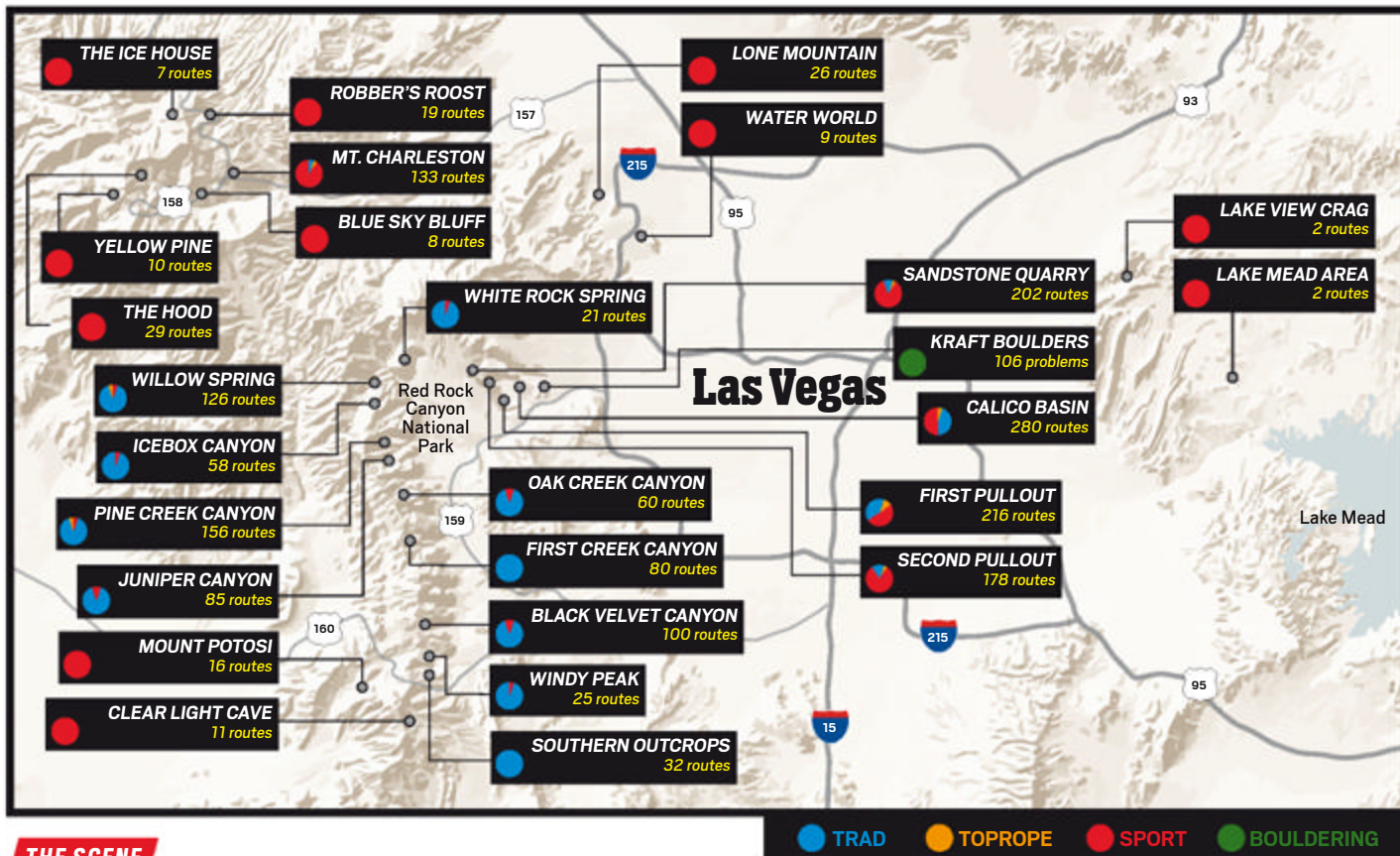
I woke up the fourth morning—the day set aside for the *Nose*—feeling like I had been beaten with a baseball bat. Everything hurt from head to toe. I tried to stay positive by telling myself that if we could get to the base, then we could climb to the summit. Break your goal into bite-size chunks and tackle one piece at a time. That makes it easier to keep pushing.



# Epicenter: Las Vegas, NV

For climbers, "America's Playground" goes well beyond the Strip

BY J.P. WHITEHEAD



## THE SCENE

## Send City

Scream "Vegas, baby!" and most people will envision loose slots, buffet binges, topless pool parties, or some version of "The Hangover." But climbers are a different breed. We see a dozen stellar pitches of 5.11 patina face climbing, T-shirt bouldering in January, or full days ascending massive red and gold desert peaks. Truth is, a short drive from the Strip proper plops one at the mouth of Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area, one of the country's premier climbing destinations. It's a beautiful section of the Nevada desert and home to climbing opportunities of every discipline, from single-pitch sport climbing at the Gallery to all-day multi-pitch adventures in numerous canyons. Boulderers will enjoy a huge selection of incredibly aesthetic and climbing-conductive sandstone in Calico Basin and Black Velvet Canyon. If you're craving something a little steeper, drive an hour north to Mt. Charleston for harder bolt-clipping out massive limestone caves. Whatever your vice, Vegas aims to please, and with climbing like this, you don't even have to play your cards right to hit the jackpot.



Tommy Caldwell bears down on the steep but clean *Crystal Dawn* (5.13c), an eight-pitch route on Buffalo Wall.

ANDREW BURR



Angela Van Wiemeersch  
nears the top on  
*Wholesome Fullback*  
(5.10a) on Whiskey Peak.





## LOCALS KNOW

## Where climbers:

## [eat]

The Strip and surrounding sprawl offer no shortage of buffets, restaurants, and fast food joints, but a little foresight can satisfy your palate while saving your wallet. For breakfast, the **Red Rock Casino** ([redrock.sclv.com](http://redrock.sclv.com)) offers a legendary buffet (voted best in Las Vegas) just 10 minutes from the Red Rock camping. The cost is \$10 for the general public or \$7 when you sign up for their Players' Club (free, 21+). This grants you the unique opportunity to play slots with a side of poached eggs. For lunch or dinner, stop by **Bachi Burger** in Summerlin for souped-up, Asian-inspired burger creations ([bachiburger.com](http://bachiburger.com)). Grass-fed beef along with toppings like yamamomo peaches and garlic-chili aioli make this an exceptional culinary experience. Sushi spot **Osaka** is an upscale favorite for local climbers ([lasvegas-sushi.com](http://lasvegas-sushi.com)). Ask to sit in the back Tatami room for the most authentic dining experience. Most options outside of fast food are relatively expensive, so a grocery store is the smart choice for those balling on a budget. There's a **Whole Foods** 15 minutes from Red Rock on West Charleston Boulevard, or, alternatively, a **Sunflower Market** ([sprouts.com](http://sprouts.com)) on South Rainbow Boulevard offers the same products at more reasonable prices.

## [sleep]

The 13-Mile Campground, two miles east of the visitor center off of West Charleston Boulevard, is the only campground in Red Rock Canyon National Conservation Area. It provides easy access to all of the climbing in the area. First-come, first-served two-vehicle campsites are \$15/night, with vault toilets and water spigots included. The campgrounds are closed each summer, typically between Memorial Day and Labor Day. Visit [redrockcanyonlv.org/redrockcanyon/camping-at-red-rock-canyon](http://redrockcanyonlv.org/redrockcanyon/camping-at-red-rock-canyon) for information on campground rules, plus details on reserving group sites. Another option: Las Vegas boasts some of the cheapest hotel rates nationwide, especially if you're rolling with a crew willing to split the cost.

## [drink]

Ten minutes from the Red Rock campground (in the same casino as the aforementioned breakfast buffet),

the **Yard House** restaurant offers a drink selection with something for everyone ([yardhouse.com](http://yardhouse.com)). Think: rotating specialty and seasonal beers on tap and happy hour specials on the hard stuff from 3 p.m. to 6 p.m., Monday through Friday, and 10 p.m. to close, Sunday through Wednesday. If you're looking to sample the best of local microbrew culture, check out the **Chicago Brewing Company** to pair award-winning drafts with Chicago-style, deep-dish pizza. We recommend the Honey Bru Bru, a Belgian-style pale brewed with sweet desert honey.

## [gear up/find a guide]

**Desert Rock Sports** ([desertrocksports.com](http://desertrocksports.com)) is an awesome gear shop just 15 minutes from Red Rock. Staffed by climbers and a few doors down from the local gym **Red Rock Climbing Center** ([redrockclimbingcenter.com](http://redrockclimbingcenter.com)), the store offers an array of climbing paraphernalia, including gear, apparel, and guidebooks. They are also an excellent resource for climbing, camping, showering, eating, and boozing beta—they are definitely the locals that know. You can even rent crashpads there for \$15/day. With free Wi-Fi, a comfy couch, and a staff that won't get mad when you and your dirtbag friends hang out in their shop for the better part of a day, what's not to love? The store recently took on a guiding service as well, providing half- and full-day excursions into the Calico Hills for groups of all sizes and ability levels. Check out their website for information on rates, permits, passes, and weather, along with answers to pressing questions like: "Why are the rocks so RED?"

## [shower]

We cannot stress enough the value of a good shower after a few days camping in the desert, sleeping in the dirt, and being blasted by a sand-filled wind. Lucky for you, **Red Rock Climbing Center** has showers for just \$4 in an environment that welcomes and understands the sandy, sweaty, chalky-fingered type.

## [spend a rest day]

It's not hard to find something to do in a place often referred to as "America's Playground." The Strip has enough casinos, stores, and restaurants to satisfy a lifetime, let alone a day to allow



Angela Van Wiemeersch and Jewell Lund on the aesthetic *Our Father* (5.10 R), which climbs 300 feet to the top of the pillar.

the skin to heal. If all of that sounds a little too touristy—or maybe you're terrible at gambling—the entire Las Vegas region offers many beautiful hiking and biking opportunities as well. Try the four-mile hike up Turtlehead Peak, one of the tallest summits in Calico Basin that doesn't

require technical climbing, for killer panoramic views of the canyon. On a rainy day (there aren't many), go see a movie or take a swim at the **Red Rock Casino** ([redrock.sclv.com](http://redrock.sclv.com)). Vegas truly has a little something for everyone, and it's the only climbing area where a rest day could make you rich!



## ROUTES

# Vegas Classics

The 10 best 4-star routes as ranked by Mountain Project users

### Dark Shadows (5.8)

Pine Creek Canyon, Red Rock  
“Great route! Cool creek and crystal-clear pools at the base. We got to watch mountain goats defy gravity on the cliffs across the way. Is anybody else amazed that an international epicenter of hedonistic pleasure, vice, and grime is so close when back in these beautiful canyons? I always am.”

### Epinephrine (5.9)

Black Velvet Canyon, Red Rock  
“Holy smokes! This climb delivers a little bit of something for everyone! The chimney pitches are just the price of admission for an unbelievable upper section. Do not underestimate the descent. We did car to car in 12 hours, and I’m confident that we spent three hours of that on the descent.”

### 1057 (5.10)

Mt. Charleston  
“This is a great climb that reminded me of Owens River Gorge, California. Big holds that are easy on the hands.”

### The Nightcrawler (5.10b)

Juniper Canyon, Red Rock  
“Great route and nice views of the Rainbow Wall. Highly recommend topping this out. We climbed a route on Jackrabbit Buttress to get to *The Nightcrawler*, and then did the scenic walk-off down Gunsight Notch. My toes were tired the next morning from all the stemming!”

### Levitation 29 (5.11)

Oak Creek Canyon, Red Rock  
“Deserves every bit of the hype it gets. Pitch after pitch of amazing climbing, great exposure, and a remote feeling. Views were awesome. If you commit to the approach, finish the route and walk off—it’s worth it.”

### Mr. Choad’s Wild Ride (5.11b)

Calico Basin, Red Rock  
“Extraordinarily good route, one of the best sport routes I’ve ever done

at the grade. Unlike any other route in the area. Long moves, big holds, and somewhat spicy if you’re pumped!”

### Cloud Tower (5.12-)

Juniper Canyon, Red Rock  
“This is a great route, climbed it when I was 17 and 135 lbs. with little stick fingers, and again at 26, same height, 165 lbs. with sausage fingers. I hope to climb it every few years until my old ass can’t make it out there anymore.”

### The Original Route (5.12)

Juniper Canyon, Red Rock  
“One of the most amazing free climbs I have ever done, and climbers should not be scared away by the lofty grade. Every move approaching 5.12 on the route is protected by a nice shiny bolt, allowing you both the comfort of safety and the foresight that a crux may follow. Very accessible for the grade. Great pro, tons of face holds,

not a hand jam in sight (literally), rap anchors everywhere—I guess what I’m trying to say is anyone clipping bolts at the Gallery can, and certainly should, go clip some bolts on the Rainbow Wall instead!”

### Monster Skank (5.13b)

Sandstone Quarry, Red Rock  
“World-class! Fun start through very cool rock features. For me there were two cruxes: one near the beginning with a pinky jam and the mandatory all-points-off dyno farther up.”

### Wet Dream (V12)

Black Velvet Canyon, Red Rock  
“One look and the name is evident. A singular line up a monster of hard, compact sandstone sitting in the middle of a dried-up riverbed. Water-sculpted holds and stellar movement. One of the best in the country. Period.”



\*Stats are for the immediate Vegas area. Get route beta, photos, and topos for the whole state at [mountainproject.com/nevada](http://mountainproject.com/nevada).



Thin but bomber: Peter Vintoniv finds small gear on *Straight Shooter* (5.9), the namesake route on this wall.



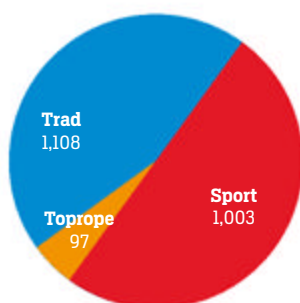


Katharina Saurwein sends *Slice N Dice* (V9 R), on the appropriately named Plumber's Crack Boulder.

### METRICS

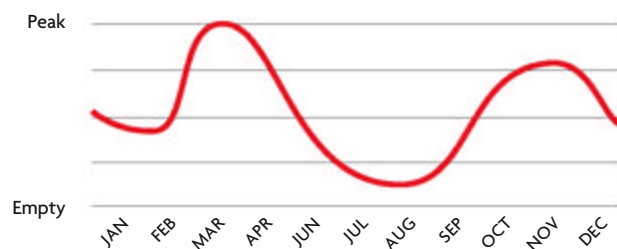
#### STYLE

A playground for sport and a proving ground for trad



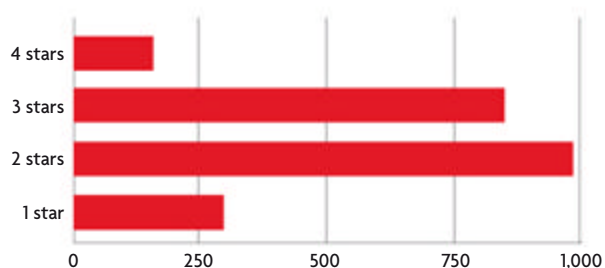
#### SEASON

Warm winter wonderland



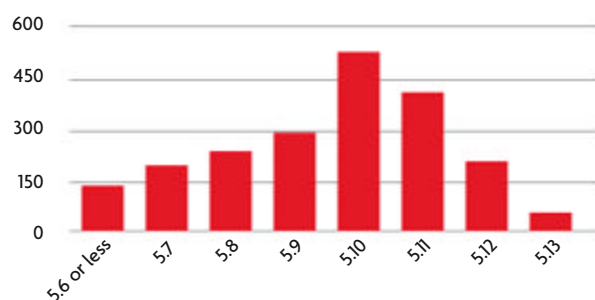
#### QUALITY

Sandstone doesn't get any better than this



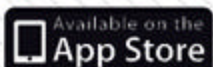
#### DIFFICULTY

5.10 climbers shine





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# The Art of the Heel Hook

Master this foot technique to send harder

BY JULIE ELLISON

THERE ARE FEW MOVES in the canon of climbing techniques that are as advantageous and useful as the heel hook. It's the type of move that can bump beginner climbers to intermediate, magically unlock the beta of a tricky crux, provide an incredible rest, and increase endurance on steep climbs—to name but a few. It seems simple in theory—throw your heel around a hold or feature to use those powerful leg muscles to pull you into the wall—but it's much more nuanced in practice. Below we'll outline tips and tricks to maximize heel hooks, including advice from pro climber Nina Williams, who relies on heel hooks to be one of the best in the world.

## THE MOVE

The heel-hook position gives your leg a more direct pulling motion (instead of pushing), which holds your body in close to the wall and assists in maintaining overall body tension. Both are important for making difficult moves, particularly on overhanging terrain and bad holds, and they can help your upper body last longer. Essentially, it turns your leg into another arm. Having your extremely strong and powerful legs as an extra pulling tool is hugely beneficial because it also helps get the ever-important core involved, makes slopers and bad holds usable, adds a third point of reliable contact, takes weight off your arms, and can put you in a totally different body position that might help you reach faraway holds. One of the biggest secrets to successful heel hooking is confidence, especially when you're just starting to add this move to your repertoire. It will feel foreign and insecure at first, but trusting it will help you rely on it more, which in turn will make it even better.

► If you are struggling on a certain move, particularly on steep terrain, think about how a heel hook will affect your body tension and positioning. Will it take weight off your arms, thus decreasing the strength needed to hold a crappy sloper? Will it move your body into a horizontal position so you can reach up farther with your hand? Don't be afraid to throw a heel hook really high, as in head height or higher!

► Once you've decided to try a heel hook, examine where the heel should be placed to maximize surface contact, looking for dips or bumps to catch the heel. Accuracy is important, especially in finicky placements.

## Right Tools for the Job

You want shoes that have a decent amount of rubber in the heel, and some will have a dedicated heel cup that is a separate and distinct piece of rigid rubber that supports your heel. Some kicks will also have ridges or bumps in the heel to provide more purchase on divots and irregularities in the rock. These options are more a matter of personal preference; you might like the individual heel cup or you might like a soft, supple heel that offers a sensitive feel for wrapping subtle features. One thing is true across the board, though: Tighten laces or Velcro as much as possible to prevent your heel from slipping in the shoe. This small detail will lock your foot in place for all types of footwork.

Place your heel in the correct spot, keep your hips in close to the wall, and try to pull your heel toward your butt by engaging all the muscles in the leg.

► Point your toes to further activate the leg. When it feels like a solid placement, pull harder with the heel, and have confidence that it will hold while you look to the next move. Confidence is the key to making it stick.

► While moving upward, treat your heel and leg like an arm, continuing to pull in as your body goes up.

► Releasing a heel hook will reverse all the positive effects you had from it, meaning it can result in a drastic loss of body tension and could cause your feet to swing out from the wall. To mitigate this, try to find a solid hold for your other foot to act as a balancing point, and while keeping your core super-tight, very slowly release the heel to transfer the weight back to your other foot and hands.



## HIGH-LEVEL HEEL HOOKS with Nina Williams

### Save energy, gain reach

Heel hooks keep your body in place by acting as a stabilizer so moves can be made without swinging off the rock, but it can also help you reach something that seems too far away. It can leverage your body into a better position, closer to that one hold you need. I'm 5'3" and use heel hooks all the time to make up for reach. This move also saves a ton of energy by engaging the stronger hamstring muscle in addition to the core. Plus, heel hooks let you make big moves statically, as opposed to exerting an excessive amount of energy trying to do a dynamic move.

### Beyond the basics

Take it a step further by improving the position of your toes. Ideally, they should be pointing downward and away from the heel, which causes the knee to turn outward. This rotation at the knee allows you to flex the calf and hamstring more, pulling you in or up, depending on the move. It is also important to place the heel well. Take time to look for the most surface area on a hold; it is possible to heel hook on even the smallest crimps if they have a lip to catch some shoe rubber.

### Practice makes perfect

Since heel hooking is more a technique than a physical power, practice, as opposed to strength training, is the best way to improve. Make up heel hooks at all types of angles and on different features in the gym to get the feel of it down, then go outside and let Mother Nature and her infinite possibilities be the coach that tells you how to further focus your gym training. Of course, it does help to have strong calves and hamstrings, so don't skip leg day when weightlifting, and always warm up and stretch the legs before heel hooking. Unfortunately they are the cause of many hamstring tears. Flexible hips are also crucial (male climbers especially!), so add some hip-opening stretches to your weekly training.



# CLIMB THE PEAK OF YOUR DREAMS

RAISE MONEY FOR A GREAT CAUSE.



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How it works: Choose one of 19 epic peaks, raise money to support Big City Mountaineers youth and climb the peak of your dreams on a professionally guided trip. Funds raised cover all trip expenses except travel to the peak location. Participants receive a mountain of free gear too! Put together a team of friends or join a climb on your own and meet new ones.

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- Mt. Whitney
- Aconcagua
- Grand Teton
- Mt. Shasta
- Design a Custom Climb

\*photo courtesy of Eddie Bauer/Jake Norton





# Play Time!

BY JULIE ELLISON AND J.P. WHITEHEAD

16 climbing games to put the fun back in gym training



IT'S BEEN A LONG WINTER, with hours spent pulling on the same plastic holds and projecting the same mediocre problems. If you're like us, you're probably a bit bored and itching to get outside, but the fickle spring weather isn't quite ready to cooperate. What you need is a training makeover that injects pure fun into your potentially played-out routine. Well, it's your lucky day, because we've got the perfect solution. These playful games aren't just for kids' climbing teams; the lighthearted competitive spirit and try-hard atmosphere of climbing in a group will get your psych up and refill those currently drained tanks of motivation. While you might not be doubling your power or nailing that one double-kneebar, undercling-iron-cross move, you'll benefit from getting more time on the wall and taking a break from the "work" aspect of training. Get your friends and training partners involved and try these out a few times a week to stay inspired and enthusiastic—after all, the best climber in the world is the one having the most fun.

## **ADD-ON**

### **Number of players:**

2+ (smaller groups work better)

### **Setup:**

Pick a sequence of three or four moves that all the players can do, and then decide who goes first. It's easier to play on a bouldering wall, since routes would require a lot of time to switch climbers.

### **Gameplay:**

The first climber does the predetermined sequence, adding one "move," typically defined as one hand movement with set footholds (foot movements are not considered stand-alone moves). The next climber repeats the new sequence and adds on a move of their own. If a climber cannot perform the previously added sequence, they lose a life. If they complete the added-on move, this is considered a checkpoint. Even if they fail to add another move, they are safe. Three failed attempts (lives lost) means elimination. Continue adding on moves until 1) you're all bored, 2) you run out of room and don't feel like traversing, or 3) one climber is left standing. It's optional if you want to let other players help the climber remember the sequence by pointing out holds.

### **Training purpose:**

Route-finding, memorizing sequences, endurance, working on weaknesses (especially when playing with someone who climbs differently than you—tall vs. short, crimp vs. compression, etc.)

## **GOLF**

### **Number of players:**

2+

### **Setup:**

Pick six or more marked boulder problems or routes that are well within the players' ability levels; it helps to play against people who are of similar height and skill level. Each problem or route represents a "hole" on the hypothetical golf course.

### **Gameplay:**

Players take turns trying to do each route or problem with as few holds as possible, and each player gets one go at the problem for each round. Each handhold used translates to a stroke. Each fall receives a three-stroke penalty. Keep track of each climber's score throughout. Whoever has the least amount of points at the end of the course wins.

### **Training purpose:**

Route-finding, dynamic and deadpoint movement, power-endurance

### **Variations!**

→ **5 SECONDS:** Right before you latch any hold you're about to add, hover your hand over it for a full five seconds.

→ **FEET ONLY:** Switch it so feet are the focus and add foot moves; all hands are on.

→ **BONUS:** If you can skip any previous move, you can "steal" that move and add an extra move at the end of your regular turn (e.g., skip one move, add two at the end).

→ **DIRECTIONAL:** Go one direction the first round, go the opposite direction the next round, still adding moves if you can.

## **ELIMINATOR**

### **Number of players:**

1+ (smaller groups work better, can be played alone)

### **Setup:**

Pick a route or boulder problem well within the players' ability—the more moves, the better.

### **Gameplay:**

Climbers take turns repeating the problem, one person eliminates a hold after each successful round of attempts. If the next climber can't do the new sequence, it gets passed on to the next climber. When nobody is capable of doing the sequence, the climber who eliminated the hold must prove the sequence can be done. Keep going until either only one person or nobody can do the sequence.

### **Training purpose:**

Creative route-finding, figuring out beta, dynamic and deadpoint movement



## LEMON - LIMES

**Number of players:**  
1

**Setup:**  
Pick a bouldering problem that's doable but slightly challenging for you.

**Gameplay:**  
Make the first move of the problem, and then reverse to the start. Without coming off, make the first two moves, and then go back to the start. Keep going until you've reached the top. That's the lemon! For the lime, do the same thing with downclimbing—you still don't come off! Start at the top, downclimb one move, then back to the top. Two moves down then back to the top. Once you've downclimbed to the start and back up to the top, you can jump off.

**Training purpose:**  
Endurance, endurance, endurance, power-endurance

## LUCKY DRAW

**Number of players:**  
1+

**Setup:**  
Write down about 10 different climbing moves onto slips of paper (drop-knee, right-hand lockoff, left-hand dyno, gaston, heel hook, etc.) and place the slips into a bag.

**Gameplay:**  
Pull four slips out of the bag, and then try to create a problem or route that uses all of the movements.

**Training purpose:**  
Sequence creation, creative thinking, unlocking beta, figuring out the benefit of one move versus another

## TWISTER

**Number of players:**  
Small groups of 3 or 4

**Setup:**  
Similar to the popular board game. You can use the spinner board from the actual game or make your own. Write down on slips of paper: right hand, left hand, right foot, and left foot, then write the colors (and types for more of a challenge) of the holds on separate slips. One person is the "spinner." Climbers start on similar but separate sections of wall. It works best on vertical walls that are filled in with many holds, but it can be done on steeper terrain for a much harder challenge.

**Gameplay:**  
The spinner randomly selects one of each slip. All of the climbers must then execute the drawn movement. For example, left hand to blue crimp, right foot to green pinch. A player is eliminated when they cannot do the drawn movement.

**Training purpose:**  
Flexibility, endurance, core stability

## HOT LAVA

**Number of players:**  
1+

**Setup:**  
On a long section of wall, use string to mark off sections of the wall as "hot lava."

**Gameplay:**  
Climbers must make their way from start to finish without touching any holds within the hot lava sections. Add more hot lava or laps.

**Training purpose:**  
Endurance, route-finding

## DRAG RACE

**Number of players:**  
Groups of 2

**Setup:**  
For boulder problems, set a timer for 15 minutes; for routes, set it for 30.

**Gameplay:**  
Go against the clock and your opponent by climbing as many problems or routes as possible in

the allotted time. Earn points for harder climbs: 5.11 is worth 11 points; V3 is worth three points. Adjust accordingly to your gym's unique grading system, e.g., using spots. Whoever gets the most points wins!

**Training purpose:**  
Endurance, power-endurance (and more fun than 4x4's!), climbing smoothly and quickly under pressure

## FAST FUN

Less involved but just as interesting games

**1. COMPETE WITH YOUR BELAYER FOR POINTS:** 5.10 is 10, 5.11 is 11, etc. A fall costs you one point and a take costs you two. Climb all night, and the highest

number of points wins.

**2. PICK-UP:** For the younger crowd, use stuffed animals or small coins. Prop them on holds and have the little ones climb until he or she has collected them all without coming off.

**3. FORCED FALLS:** Climber and belayer

pick lead climbs they're pretty comfortable on. When one person is climbing, the belayer yells "fall" at any point and the climber has to let go right then and there.

**4. TAG:** A group spreads out on the wall and starts traversing. Each person tries to tag the

person in front. If you get tagged you're out; if you fall, go to the back of the pack and start over.

**5. CLIMB LIKE A PRO:** Pick a professional climber and try to complete a route in his or her style. For example, Chris Sharma-style would be big,

dynamic moves with feet cutting; Lynn Hill would be controlled and static, keeping in mind beta for short people.

**6. BETA GAMES:** One person completes a route or problem, and everyone else must copy that climber's beta exactly.

**7. SINGLE-FOOT SENDING:** Climb a route or problem with only your right foot, and then climb it with only your left.

**8. ALL THE GRADES:** Pick a grade and climb all of that particular grade in the gym, bouldering or sport.



# Climber Carbs

Get a full serving of veggies, grains, and meat in this healthy dish

BY JULIE ELLISON



CLIMBING HARD can burn more than 500 calories per hour, so it's no wonder you crave bacon cheeseburgers, burritos, and entire pizzas after a long day. But, with climbing again tomorrow in mind, it's far better to target a meal that can replenish the energy burned from crushing route after route without leaving you feeling bloated or weighed down. Enter this light but filling feast of turkey meatballs and fettuccine. One helping of this healthy meal provides a full serving of vegetables, grains, and meat, while offering just the right balance of fuel and recovery components. The pasta provides the required carbohydrates to refill your muscles' glycogen stores, which, along with protein from the meat, will help them recover and be ready for action faster. Whole-wheat pasta delivers the fiber your body needs for efficient digestion, and turkey is an excellent lean option for maximum protein with less fat. Last but not least, there's little more satisfying than chowing down on a steaming bowl of pasta! Keep this as a perfect recovery meal at the end of a session, or take it to the crag for an ideal lunch.

## Directions

1. Combine ground turkey, breadcrumbs, eggs, garlic, onion flakes, basil, salt, and pepper in a large bowl and mix well.
2. Coat a large nonstick skillet with cooking spray. Roll meat mixture into 40 two-inch balls and place a single layer in the skillet. (They usually have to be cooked in two batches.)
3. Brown over medium heat, using tongs or a wooden spoon to turn the meatballs so the outsides cook evenly.
4. Transfer meatballs to a large saucepan and pour in the tomato-basil sauce. Cover and simmer over a low flame for 40 minutes.
5. While the meatballs are cooking, fill a large saucepan with water and a pinch of salt. Bring to a boil over medium-high heat, then add fettuccine. Cook 12 to 14 minutes or as directed on the package. Pour into a colander to drain.
6. Add about  $\frac{3}{4}$  cup cooked fettuccine to each plate and top with a few meatballs and sauce.

### Nutrition Facts

per serving (1 plate)

<b>Energy</b> 400 cal	<b>Carbs</b> 55g
<b>Fat</b> 5g	<b>Fiber</b> 8g
<b>Protein</b> 38g	



## Ingredients



2 lbs. 99% lean ground turkey breast



1/3 cup whole-wheat breadcrumbs



3 cloves garlic, minced



1 tablespoon dried onion flakes



2 eggs



1/2 teaspoon + 1 pinch salt



1/4 teaspoon black pepper



2 tablespoons fresh basil, chopped



4 cups tomato-basil pasta sauce



Cooking spray



1 lb. whole-wheat fettuccine

## FILL UP!

\*Republished with permission of VeloPress from the *Racing Weight Cookbook*. Try more recipes at [racingweightcookbook.com](http://racingweightcookbook.com).





## Not-So-Crummy Breadcrumbs

Turn stale bread into homemade breadcrumbs

Purchasing whole-wheat breadcrumbs is acceptable if you're crunched for time (we like the 4C brand), but better yet, you can make your own crumbs from scratch. This will offer more customization for your meal, and it's a great way to put stale bread to use instead of tossing it in the compost bin.

**Step 1.** Use about half a loaf of old bread that's firm and dry, but not rock-hard.

**Step 2.** Cut into small cubes. Leave the crust on for extra crunch.

**Step 3.** Use a food processor or blender on pulse mode until the bread is finely and evenly ground.

**Step 4.** Bake on a cookie sheet for 10 minutes at 375°.

**Step 5.** Season to taste.

## A pasta-less, gluten-free alternative

Whether you're sensitive to gluten or just tired of pasta, an excellent option is to use a spaghetti squash instead of fettuccine noodles. It will reduce calories and carbs by more than 80%, and it will also give you a second serving of veggies for the day, as well as still provide much-needed fiber. Spaghetti squash looks like an oblong cantaloupe on the outside, but after it's cooked, the fibrous, strand-like innards look almost exactly like spaghetti pasta. It's quite easy to prepare, either in the oven or in the microwave, and you can do it while the meatballs simmer.

### ► Microwave.

Cut the squash in half lengthwise and scrape out all the seeds. Fill a microwave-safe dish with about one inch of water. Place both halves flat-side down in the water. Microwave on high for about 12 minutes—the outer flesh should be tender when you poke it with a fork. Pull it out and let it cool for at least 10 minutes, or until it's at a temperature that's safe to handle. Use a fork to scrape down the length of the squash, pulling out the long strands.

### ► Oven.

Cut the squash and scrape the seeds same as above. Roast in a 400° oven for about 45 minutes, until the outer flesh is tender. It might take slightly longer or shorter, depending on the size of your squash. Let it cool and then scrape lengthwise with a fork to pull out the strands.

### WHOLE-WHEAT FETTUCCINE

#### Nutrition Facts per serving (1 cup)

**Energy** 174 cal

**Fat** 1g

**Carbs** 37g

### SPAGHETTI SQUASH

#### Nutrition Facts per serving (1 cup)

**Energy** 31 cal

**Fat** 0.6g

**Carbs** 7g





Mark Harmon,  
Stand Up To Cancer Ambassador

# I AM MY OWN SECRET WEAPON.

The battle against cancer is hard fought and hard won, and often treatments are as debilitating as the disease itself. But inside each of us is the power to fight cancer: our immune system. Stand Up To Cancer and the Cancer Research Institute have joined forces in one of the most promising new research areas, using the science of immunology to get our bodies' own natural defenses to fight the disease. Immunotherapy has the potential to significantly change the treatment of cancer as we know it. Stand Up with us. Together, we can impact millions of lives.

To learn more go to [StandUp2Cancer.org](http://StandUp2Cancer.org)  
or [CancerResearch.org/Dream-Team](http://CancerResearch.org/Dream-Team)



CANCER  
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INSTITUTE



Stand Up To Cancer is a program of the Entertainment Industry Foundation, a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization.

Photo by Kevin Lynch





# HANGBOARDS

Hang with open hands, not closed crimping.

Arms should be slightly bent at the elbow.

Keep head up in a neutral position, eyes straight ahead.

Engage your back by pulling slightly up and squeezing shoulder blades together.

Keep core tight and activated.

## INCORRECT



Hands in a closed crimp

Elbows not bent

Head dropped forward

Back not engaged

Shoulders hunched

Let lower body hang without swinging.

Ah, hangboard training. Necessary for advancing through the grades of the climbing elite, but somewhat, well, boring for those of us who, let's face it, just want to climb. But boredom be gone! With a new breed of training tools from some of the best minds in the industry, we've found a crop that provide tons of variety, adjustable difficulty levels, comfort on skin, and, dare we say—fun—for training! As simple as the concept may seem, there are right and wrong ways to hang, so check out this page for proper technique and then keep reading for the finest finger-strength trainers out there.



# Hang Time

Target your training with one of these 5 premier hangboards

BY JULIE ELLISON



For every climber, whether intermediate, advanced, or elite, hangboard training is one of the most proven and time-tested ways to break through a plateau.

Finger-specific training isolates and improves forearm strength, and hangboards are a guaranteed way to give you strength gains like you've probably never seen before. We hung eight of the newest boards in our favorite local gym, The Spot Bouldering Gym in Boulder, Colorado, and had hundreds of hardcore climbers train on them for a period of three months, and then offer us feedback. The following five boards are the best of the best, and whether you're new to the hangboarding scene or you've recorded every hangboard session you've ever done for the past 10 years, we've got a board for you.

## Hangboard

**Trango Rock Prodigy Board**  
\$120; [trango.com](http://trango.com)



**bäm! Board**  
\$149; [bamclimbing.com](http://bamclimbing.com)



## Performance

"I loved the different depths on the same edge. It increased the number of holds without adding size to the board, and the small raised bumps inside the pockets made it really easy to find the same spot every time," one tester said of the Rock Prodigy's unique variable-edge system. Testers also agreed that this board had "the most worthwhile pinches" because they were positioned with the thumb on the bottom and fingers on top; this isolates the forearm and hand muscles you use when pinching. Other boards allow you to cheat a little bit by placing pinches on the outside of the board so your thumb and fingers are on either side; this position allows you to activate the compression muscles in your chest and shoulders, so you're not focusing fully on forearm pinch strength. Testers found the overall texture of the board pretty aggressive, and some of the smallest edges were a little sharp, but they were easily sanded down for more comfort and ease of use. It is more difficult and involved to mount than any other board because you must customize the width and mount two pieces. However, using the Rock Prodigy on a DIY sliding-panel system (meaning you can change the width at any time) was excellent for asymmetric training.

As the smallest board in the test with the most adjustability, the brand-new bäm! board stood out with its feature-rich design, innovation, and ease on skin. Testers loved that this board had something for every level of climber and training, as you could change the depth of each edge and pocket while at the same time changing the angle of the board. Each edge ranges from 0.5 cm to 3.5 cm, and the angle goes from 15° to 50° in 5° increments. The angle change was particularly useful for sloper training; whereas other boards usually have one sloper hold, this board has two slopers which can be used at any of those angles, thus increasing its utility. "It's a compact board that doesn't sacrifice hold types or sizes," one tester said, "and it changes with you, since it's really easy to make everything slightly harder." Adjusting the edge depth with the screws on the bottom proved to be finicky, especially when trying to get the exact same depth on both. The outer pocket holds have a smart design, with a recessed middle section that gives you slightly more room for your longer middle finger. Large-pawed testers even found that they could train pinches by using the slopers and wrapping a thumb underneath the bottom. Bonus: This small board fits pretty much everywhere.

## Conclusion

The personalization on this board, from variable-depth edges to a customizable overall width, the high-friction surface, and 15+ grips make this a board that's great to have for the long haul as you progress as a climber. Look elsewhere to target sloper strength.

If you have a small amount of space and/or want one board that will serve you well as you get stronger, this is the tool for you. It's ideal for training slopers and edges, and anyone with thin or damaged skin will love the wood's smooth and comfortable feel.

**Bottom Line**

**Customize and Personalize**

**Adjustable Everything**



# HISTORY OF HANGBOARDS ➔

In the early 1970s, Rob Candelaria was a member of the University of Colorado's gymnastics team. He picked up climbing and as a self-proclaimed "gym rat," Candelaria and his friends were always looking for concepts to improve and ways to get stronger by training inside. He was even accused of cheating in the early '70s because he was training indoors for climbing. In the mid-1980s, Candelaria found himself with a large kitchen cutting board that was too big for his current space. "It was a great piece of wood so I didn't want to throw it away. I started thinking about what I could do with it," he says. So Candelaria, who is now the owner of CATS gymnastics and bouldering gym in Boulder, drilled a few dozen holes, pockets, and edges of all different sizes, tacking on a few blocks of wood to the outside for pinches. Manufacturers of climbing goods eventually picked up what Candelaria was doing and started making hangboards out of materials like urethane and various plastics. —JULIE ELLISON

## So iLL Boost \$119; [soillholds.com](http://soillholds.com)



"If you're new to finger-specific training or are prone to injury, this is your board," one tester said of the Boost. "It's easy to figure out which holds you should be training on because there are four rows of identically shaped holds that grow progressively harder as you go down." With two rounded jugs on top, a sloper edge, then one-, two-, three-, and four-finger pockets, all with the same incremental change in depths, testers were able to design their own systematic training sessions, and after a few months it was really easy to see progress. "In the beginning I couldn't even hang on the second-hardest row, but by the end I was training on the hardest row. Seeing that improvement kept me going and maintained motivation to train more!" This was also the most comfortable plastic board in the review, with durable urethane but really softly rounded edges that never dug into sensitive fingers. "This board was shaped with hands in mind; the ergonomic shape of every hold is really easy on my precious mitts." Ding: Only one moderate sloper and no pinches limited the hold variety. Bonus: Many commented on the aesthetics of the Boost: "It looks like art instead of a hangboard—great when you have a non-climber roommate."

This super-comfy board is incredibly easy to train on, and it will keep you motivated because you can track progress with the evenly spaced increases in hold difficulty. No pinches and one sloper might be a deal-breaker for more advanced climbers.

**Beginner's  
Best Friend**

## Progression Board \$265 (includes board plus approximate shipping cost from Europe); [jmcimbing.com](http://jmcimbing.com)



This board is incredibly simple and even more effective: Train on a series of ever-smaller crimps to see and feel real progress as your fingers get stronger. Backed by 10 years of research in the sports science and climbing worlds, the Progression system is based around the idea that it's optimal to train just below maximum strength to see actual gains while also avoiding injury. That's why there are only crimps and each one is slightly smaller than the last. Following creator Eva Lopez' instructions, testers were able to find exactly what their personal max was, and then train slightly under it to push themselves without taking it too far. "I loved this because it was so straightforward," one tester said after a month on the board. "Every time I went to train, I felt like I was making noticeable strides instead of worrying about being ineffective or wondering if I'm using the 'right' holds." Obviously the biggest drawback to this board is the lack of variety in hold types (no slopers or pinches at all), and some testers got a little bored with the crimps-only design. However, that design produced results: "The precise, graduated hold size made it easy to track progress and work my way up, and the 2mm difference between hold sizes is ideal." The Progression is excellent for intermediate climbers; advanced climbers should check out the harder Transgression board.

If you're a Type A climber when it comes to training, you'll love this systematic board and training regimen from the ridiculously strong Spaniards. It produces impressive results quickly in a strict and somewhat supervised environment.

**Straightforward  
Strength**

## Metolius Contact \$95; [metoliusclimbing.com](http://metoliusclimbing.com)



With edges, pockets, pinches, slopers, and jugs galore, this is the big mamma-jamma of the hangboard world. "I feel like I could train on this forever," one tester said. That's thanks to the slight curve of the overall shape, which reduces stress on shoulder, wrist, elbow, and finger joints. Instead of a harsh, straight-down pulling motion, it creates a more neutral orientation for when the hands and arms are spread wide, making your fingers rotate ever-so-slightly outward into a more natural and ergonomic position. Testers with tweaky shoulders and wrists gravitated to this board every time, and the fine-grained surface texture was just grippy enough without tearing up irritated skin. However, the large amount of hold variety without any subtle adjustment features meant this was one of the biggest boards in the review and required a lot of space (and a lot of screws) to mount. The pinches on the side of this board tapered at the top and flared at the bottom, with very narrow and much wider options, meaning you can train a certain size of pinch or pick the best grip based on your hand size. A slightly positive but soft edge on the pinches was great for targeting this hold type for entire sessions. Testers loved the jug and sloper holds. Also, the sub-\$100 price is really nice.

Several sizes of every hold type imaginable make the training possibilities endless on the Contact board, but keep in mind you will need a fair amount of space to mount it. Consider this board if you have wrist or shoulder problems.

**Excellent All-Around**



# Field Notes

The latest and greatest from our diligent testers

BY JULIE ELLISON



## → UNBEATABLE CLIMBING JEANS

### Bulletproof Denim

With so many things in life, the idea is often better than the outcome. Take climbing jeans for instance. The durability, breathability, and laid-back style make them a go-to. But many are too restrictive. Or too loose. Or too hot. Or too techy. It's hard to find the perfect pair. Enter Bulletproof, a brand out of Charlotte, North Carolina. Testers loved these unassuming, normal-looking jeans more than models marketed as "climbing jeans" because, "They look good, fit well, are tough, and have enough stretch for all types of movement." Originally designed for skaters and "action sports," designers focused on style, durability, and ergonomics. The fabric, which claims to be up to 10 times tougher than regular denim is a proprietary quad-blend ripstop that combines nylon and polyester for durability, Spandex for stretch, and cotton for comfort. Then they added triple stitching on all the seams with a super-strong thread, including a double-reinforced yoke (seam that runs across the back of the jean right above the butt) and bar-tacked pockets, both places that see a ton of wear, stress, and abuse, whether you're an offwidthder or a boulderer. Denim and chinos are available in a variety of colors, and the price for such long-lasting pants is excellent. **\$78; bulletproof.bigcartel.com**



## → COZY, TECHED-OUT APPROACH SHOE

### Salewa Capsico Insulated

We raved about these approach shoes last year, loving their approach-turned-clog design that held up on semi-technical approaches but offered easy on—easy off comfort when testers were constantly switching out between street and climbing shoes. A large rubber strap goes around the Achilles on approaches for a snug, specialized fit, and then that same strap flips over to the front, and the rear of the shoe seamlessly flattens to become a simple slip-on at the crag. Now Salewa has upped the ante with a winterized version that provides cozy warmth with PrimaLoft insulation on the inside. "Not only are they really toasty, but the soft inside is like wrapping a beautiful cloud around my tortured feet," one tester explained. "Sometimes halfway up a route I'm motivated to finish just so I can get down and put these babies on." However, testers agreed that the increased comfort doesn't negate any performance. A lugged sole with durable rubber offered purchase on and off trail, while the 3F Vario lacing system tightens the entire upper when you crank on the quick-closing laces. Plus, a beefy toe bumper protected sensitive tootsies on rocky approaches, and odor-controlling silver in the lining kept the Capsicos stink-free. **\$119; salewa.us**



## → BARELY THERE BULLET PACK

### Patagonia Linked 16L

"The sign of a top-notch leader pack is the fact that I can actually forget I'm wearing it while climbing," one tester said after almost 40 pitches of rocking the Linked in big wall sport climbing heaven El Potrero Chico, Mexico. The thinly padded backpanel wraps around your torso without anything inside pinching and poking you in the back, and the low-profile design lets you squeeze through tight chimneys and offwidths without feeling restricted, as that same tester found out on the unlikely wide pitch of *Estrellita* (5.10b). It held up to sharp limestone and gritty granite thanks to super-burly 630-denier nylon, which has a polyurethane coating for added abrasion resistance. A thin webbing-only waistbelt and sternum strap helped the pack ride high and tight for balance moves on the sharp end, and a strap over the top provided a simple and welcome rope-carry system, somewhat rare for a bullet pack. Favorite feature: "The two beefy and reinforced carry handles on the top let me clip it to the anchor with more peace of mind than a flimsy little single strap provides." **\$79; patagonia.com**



## → INCREASED GRIP FOR HAND JAMMING

### Outdoor Research Splitter Gloves

Various iterations of these crack-climbing gloves have been viewed suspiciously by climbers in the past. "Isn't it cheating?" one tester asked before she tried them out on the granite cracks of Rocky Mountain National Park. After one pitch, she was sold: "Not only did I not need to waste a quarter roll of tape for one route, but these saved a lot of time. I didn't have to sit at the base for 10 minutes crafting the perfect tape gloves." Indian Creek enthusiasts loved the durable polyurethane overlays in high-abrasion areas, and these gloves are burly enough to last several seasons, ultimately saving you money over the dozen rolls of tape you'd otherwise buy. A simple hook-and-loop closure around the wrist lets you customize fit, and small-handed testers were particularly smitten with the additional width it provided for their tiny mitts. One said, "These gloves gave me just slightly more size in hand cracks that were previously 'loose hands' for me. With the money savings, comfort, ease of use, less time spent making gloves, and eco-consciousness of not wasting so much tape, I'm not sure why every climber doesn't already have a pair." Available in three sizes. **\$39; outdoorresearch.com**



# Basecamp Bartender

BY JULIE ELLISON

6 products to keep you boozin' in the backcountry

## MOUNTAINSMITH COOLER TUBE

"Why hasn't anyone done this before?!" was the first question out of every climber's mouth who used this brilliant tube of insulating goodness. With the profile of a yoga mat carrier, this cooler is a cylinder of thick insulation, with a full-length zipper and a shoulder strap for straightforward carrying. It holds a six-pack of beer with the cans stacked on top of one another, and it will keep pre-chilled drinks cold all day in cool weather and several hours in milder temps. "Sling this over a shoulder like a messenger bag or strap it to the outside of your pack to haul beers efficiently." \$22; [mountainsmith.com](http://mountainsmith.com)

## BLENDER BOTTLE GOSTAKS

Although these sweet little carriers were designed with protein powders and healthy snacks in mind, leave it to our tribe to find an—ahem—"alternative" use. Mixed-drink aficionados loved these stackable vessels for all the *accoutrements* that make specialty refreshments even more delightful: olives and vermouth (martini), triple sec (margarita), and cherries (almost anything). One pack comes with four containers of varying sizes, each locks on top of the other, and a convenient carrying handle lets you clip it anywhere with a biner. Made of Eastman Tritan plastic, these jars

don't hold odor or taste, so a rinse after carrying olives or cherries won't leave you with an odd flavor. \$13; [blenderbottle.com](http://blenderbottle.com)

## PAT'S BACKCOUNTRY BEVERAGE

Beer is always worth the weight, right? Not if it means lugging another 12 pounds. But with this magical gadget, you can just make beer. Fill the bottle with drinkable water, squeeze in a brew concentrate packet, add carbonation activators, shake it, let it sit a few minutes, and boom—Beer! Both the Pale Rail and Black Hops tasted like those from a microbrewery thanks to Pat's hybrid brewing technology. By using very little water but a high concentration of alcohol (like liquor), when you add water and carbonate, it's much more akin to regular beer. Use leftover liquid from a session to make a post-climbing brew. Nice touch: Each packet brews a full pint. We also mixed the ginger ale and cola flavors with spirits. \$50 (starter kit), \$10 (4 beer packets); [patsbcb.com](http://patsbcb.com)

## YETI HOPPER 30

So this cooler might not be light enough to be

"backcountry," but it's unbeatable for short jaunts, car camping, plane travel, and anywhere a hard-sided cooler is more frustration than its contents are worth. The 30-liter capacity easily housed a 30-rack with accompanying ice, and the 2" proprietary Coldcell insulation stayed chilled for three days in warm temps and five days at Joe's Valley, Utah, in fall temps. For one cross-country flight, testers loaded a triple rack and checked it, and not even abusive baggage handlers could put a scratch on it. "The only soft-sided cooler I've ever used that's truly 100% leak- and waterproof." Ding: Pricy, but comes with a three-year warranty. \$350; [yeticoolers.com](http://yeticoolers.com)

## HYDRO FLASK TRUE PINT

This Bend, Oregon company has taken the excellence of their burly insulating water bottles and applied it to a pint glass. This cup has the same vacuum-sealed, double-wall insulation as their water bottles that keep liquids cold for up to 20 hours, but, of course, no lid means it won't last quite that long. However, testers did notice that beers were significantly colder, even if it took an hour to sip heavier brews: "I was pleasantly surprised to find that my slow-drinking ways didn't leave me with a warm porter." One excellent detail: Testers agreed it felt like drinking from a real pint glass instead of a metal cup. \$22; [hydroflask.com](http://hydroflask.com)

## VARGO TITANIUM FUNNEL FLASK

What's the main problem with a flask of any size? Getting that liquid gold into the flask! Vargo has a simple but ingenious solution: a funnel that stays attached to the flask. This silicone funnel folds down around the spout where it lives, then flip it up and start filling. It does slide off for easy cleaning, but it also attaches reliably so you'd be hard-pressed to lose it. The 8 oz. size is ideal for a weekend (or a long night!), and the titanium body is practically unbreakable and relatively weightless at 3.7 ounces. "No leftover flavors or chemical aftertastes like other booze haulers—the last flask you'll ever buy." \$75; [vargoutdoors.com](http://vargoutdoors.com)





# CLIPPING SHORTCUTS

By Julie Ellison



## IMPROVE REDPOINTING EFFICIENCY WITH THESE SIMPLE CLIPPING TRICKS

When working a sport route at your limit, getting the quickdraws clipped and the rope hanging through the draws can be a stressful and frustrating obstacle. You need to focus on figuring out the crux instead of stressing about a big fall, and when it comes to putting more time and effort into climbing and less into setting up the route, every little bit helps. That's why we've gathered these experience-driven clipping techniques to streamline the process and give you the confidence you need to try hard and send. These useful tricks will help both first-time projectors and seasoned senders take their redpointing skills to the next level.

**Stick-clipping:** This is particularly helpful for the first bolt, or even the second bolt if it's low enough to the ground. For a detailed explanation on how to do it, check out [climbing.com/video/rock-climbing-basics-how-to-stick-clip](http://climbing.com/video/rock-climbing-basics-how-to-stick-clip). You can also apply this to higher bolts. Let's say you're hanging at the fourth bolt and want to get the fifth bolt clipped. First, you'll need to retrieve the stick-clip if you don't already have it with you. To do that, go in direct to the fourth bolt by clipping a quickdraw to your belay loop and to the bolt. Have the belayer feed out several feet of slack, and with that slack, drop a loop so your belayer can attach the stick-clip to the rope and you can haul it back up. (Keep in mind you will be off belay and only clipped into ONE bolt, so make sure it's a bomber bolt and move calmly but efficiently to lessen the time you're off belay.) Once you have the stick-clip in hand, clip that loop of rope through another draw and stick-clip the next bolt, or the highest bolt you can reach, making sure it's not back-clipped. Have the belayer take in as much slack as possible, and then he should have you back on belay. At this point you can remove the quickdraw that's connecting you to the bolt. With the bolt above you clipped, you're on toprope, so try hard!

**Rodeo clipping:** This method can prove to be difficult and might seem more like a circus trick than a straightforward technique, but some climbers have become masters of the rodeo clip. One important thing to note is that the rope-side biner on the intended draw must be free-hanging and not resting on the rock. Form a bight in the rope that's a bit longer than one of your arms. Stand underneath the first draw, close to the base of the rock, and begin swinging the bight around like a propeller, parallel to the rock. Pay attention to which way the biner's gate is facing and swing into the gate. Having a bent-gate biner for the rope will help it catch. As you're swinging, add a little bit of rope at a time to make slightly larger circles. Once you've put out enough rope and are ready to go for it, extend your arm just enough so the bight hits the gate sharply, which should pop the rope into the biner. Again, this isn't as easy as it sounds, but with some practice, you'll become a rodeo champion.

**Strategic unclipping:** This method only works when the draws and rope are up already, but it's an easy and fast way to ensure the rope stays clipped where you want it when you lower off. Pick the draw that you want to keep clipped, and when lowering, unclip the rope from two or

three draws above the chosen draw—more if the chosen draw is higher off the ground. When back on the ground, pull the rope that's running through the draws slowly until the end starts to reach where you've unclipped. Now you can stop pulling, and with gravity, the rope should fall through with enough slack from the unclipped draws to reach the ground. This puts the climber's side of the rope clipped through the chosen draw (and the ones below) with the end in your hand.

**Clip and lower:** The draws and rope must already be up for this technique, which is excellent for keeping a chosen draw clipped, and you won't have to worry about the rope getting caught on anything as it falls or having enough length for the end to reach the ground. Basically, it guarantees that the chosen draw will stay clipped by bringing the rope down with you to the ground. When lowering, take a quickdraw and clip it to your belay loop and to the rope running through the draws just above the draw you want to keep clipped (fig. 1). Lower down, and once you're on the ground and completely off belay, untie your knot and pull the rope from the quickdraw that's clipped to you through the top anchors. This method will put more friction in the system for the belayer when he's lowering.

fig. 1



**Warning:** This technique puts a huge loop of slack in the rope, so you absolutely *cannot* unclip the quickdraw connecting you to the rope until you're safely on the ground. If you do unclip it, that loop of slack could lead to a groundfall.



fig. 2



fig. 3



## HOMEMADE STIFFIE DRAW

**Gain extra inches for clipping just-out-of-reach protection**

If you're on the short end of the height spectrum, you've probably cruxed out a few feet below a bolt and thought to yourself, "Damn these tall route equippers!" or "Damn my T-rex arms!" Well, those days are over. Here is a simple solution that might just make the difference between sending and chickening out: the stiffie quickdraw. It's a stiffer, more rigid quickdraw that allows you to clip bolts and fixed gear higher above your head than a standard draw that flexes in the middle. Whether you're redpointing your hardest route to date or aiding your way up a bolt ladder on a big wall, this makeshift stick-clip can add up to a foot to your reach, depending on the length of the draw. All you need is a long quickdraw with wide webbing, a stiffener of sorts that will provide a spine, and a roll of climbing tape. You

can use a small stick, pen, pencil, or even break off a piece of a plastic clothes hanger for the stiffener (that's what we did). If you don't have the supporting spine on hand and you need the homemade stiffie right away, you can gain extra rigidity with several additional wraps of tape—and you can always add the spine later. Prepare at home by doing this incredibly simple and effective makeover on a few longer draws with wide dogbones, so they're always ready to go in your quiver for reachy clips.

### Stiffener Options

- Twig or small branch
- Part of a plastic clothes hanger
- Pencil or pen

1

Pick the longest draw you own that has a fat dogbone, the wider the better. (We used the 17cm Petzl Spirit Express because of the wide and stiff webbing, nice length, and the Petzl String biner keeper on one end.) If you can, switch carabiners around (take from other draws if you have to) so you have a bent-gate biner on both ends, which will make clipping easier for both the rope and the bolt.

2

Put a rubber gasket (like the Petzl String) on both carabiners. If you don't have this, then put a little extra tape on that side for extra rigidity. Now wrap both ends in tape by going around the webbing near the biner, through the biner and around one side, back through the biner, and around the other side. Do this three to four times on both ends (more on the side without the gasket).

3

Place the lightweight stiffener in the middle of the dogbone, and starting from one end, wrap all the way down its length (fig. 2). Without tearing the tape, wrap back up again. This should be enough stiffness for reliable clipping, but practice clipping while standing on the ground to make sure it's stiff enough. If not, add a few more wraps of tape, particularly at the ends where the biner meets the dogbone (fig. 3).

4

**IMPORTANT:** Once you reach a good hold, and before you climb past the stiffie draw clipped to a bolt, it's best to replace the stiffie with a normal, flexible quickdraw and clip your lead rope into the new draw. A stiff draw may cause a carabiner to lever against a bolt hanger or the rope as you climb, increasing the chance of accidental unclipping.



# OFFWIDTH PROTECTION PRIMER

By Pamela Pack



## HOW TO HANDLE BIG, CUMBERSOME PRO FOR WIDE CRACKS

The mental and physical demands of offwidth climbing are grueling, and part of that is due to the intimidation and difficulty of protecting them. You not only have to thrutch and grovel your body up a wide crack, but also have to haul and plug heavy gear that's awkward to carry, challenging to place, and a pain in the butt to climb past. Many aspiring wide-crack climbers block themselves with their own pro, kick out cams as they move past, get the rope stuck behind cam lobes, realize mid-pitch they have racked on the wrong side, and waste valuable time and energy attempting to place the perfect Big Bro. In my eight years as an offwidth climber, I've gleaned the following tips to help you become more adept at the gear portion of offwidths, which will make you a more efficient wide-crack wizard overall.

## KEEPING GEAR OUT OF THE WAY

As if it weren't challenging enough to place humongous gear, navigating around it can be just as difficult. Pinning the rope behind a knee is quite common and makes it virtually impossible to pull the rope up to clip the next piece and/or "bump" a cam. There are ways to avoid this frustrating situation: **Place gear deep inside the crack.** This is the most convenient, and it will keep your rope and gear out of the way. However, think about the reach of your follower; he or she might not be able to get to the trigger to remove gear. **Run the rope outside the crack with long runners and/or place gear outside the crack if possible.** If you are planning on bumping gear, this might present problems, as the runners may be difficult to negotiate. You may see bolts and wonder why they're outside the crack; often the bolts are placed in order to prevent rope drag and to keep the rope from running over dangerously sharp edges. **Place gear at waist level, which will prevent you from having to remove a crucial body part for upward progress.** Pay close attention when moving past it to prevent tipping it out with your foot or knee. Avoid loose slings and clothing that could catch

## BUMPING CAMS

This involves placing a cam, clipping it, and pushing it above you as you move up. It's an excellent solution for cracks that have a relatively consistent width (think: Indian Creek).

**Pros:** You can pare your rack down, reducing weight and bulk. It will also give you the mental and physical security of being on toprope.

**Cons:** If the cam tips out or falls down the rope, you could end up way above your last piece. Worse, it could knock out that last piece—and possibly your belayer. Be careful not to push your cam into a spot that's too tight, too tipped out to hold a fall, or out of your reach. One solution is to push two cams, so one acts as a backup if the other cam tips out or gets stuck. It is more work to push two, but it's safer until you've mastered the art of placing Big Bros as you bump your gear.

### Bumping Tips

➔ Rope drag combined with pushing a heavy cam creates a lot of weight. Before bumping, pull a loop of rope up and pin it behind your knee or thigh. Now you can push the cam up without the extra weight of the rope.

➔ I push cams at the top of my reach (it keeps the rope and the cam out of my way). However, don't push cams so far that you can't reach the trigger.

➔ The leader yells down "Bumping!" so the belayer knows the leader will be pulling up loops of slack—this prevents short-ropeing.

fig. 1



## Big Cam Tips

➔ If you have horrendous rope drag, back-clean pieces below.

➔ If you realize mid-pitch you have too much gear—don't carry the weight! Clip extra gear to a solid piece below.

➔ Anything between the lobes and rock reduces friction and holding power. Offwidths don't see much traffic, so they're often full of dirt. Be wary of placements in silt-filled chimneys. Look for clean rock, or if you're in a good stance, clean the rock with your gear.

➔ Big cams can rotate and fall out because of the relatively narrow head width compared to the crack size. To prevent this, place a Big Bro at the same height and in front of your cam, leaving both pieces together (fig. 1). This prevents the rope from running over the cam's lobes and flipping it over or pinning the rope. Plus, it's reassuring to have two pieces clipped below you.

➔ Long slings reduce unwanted movement and allow you to fall on a piece without putting any outward tension on a lower one. A sharp outward or sideways pull is often the cause of a cam coming out.



## PLACING BIG BROS

These expandable tube chocks are an essential tool in the wide-crack climber's arsenal. With one tube nesting inside a larger tube, they telescope to fit the crack, with a tightening/loosening collar to secure them, and in an emergency they are great to stand on for aid. Find a ground-level crack, wedge yourself into it, and practice placing them. They can be awkward to place at first, but they're completely solid, lighter than huge cams, less bulky on your rack, and the smooth, rounded shape allows the rope to run easily past them. Big Bros can provide protection while bumping a big cam, too. Climb for a body length and push your cam overhead until you are in a good "rest" position. The cam will provide a reassuring toprope as you place a Big Bro below it. As you become more proficient with Big Bros, you can "Bro and Go"—that is, place them quickly in succession without having to pause. Remember to place them deep in the crack so you won't knock them out with a knee or your foot.

Big Bros are also the only method for protecting squeeze chimneys, unless you own a 12" Valley Giant, and they're particularly useful for steep sections and roofs, where cams are easily dislodged. A Big Bro at the lip will keep your rope running smoothly.

## CLEANING BIG GEAR

The same rule that goes for a stuck body part in an offwidth applies to stuck cams as well: Resist the urge to panic—desperately pulling and thrashing—as it will only make the situation worse! Try wiggling one lobe at a time and have patience. It's taken me more than an hour to remove a stuck cam at Vedauwoo, Wyoming. However, Big Bros are somewhat disconcertingly easy to clean—look at them funny and they will fall out. The basics are to loosen the collar, push up from below on the high end of the Bro, and press down from above on the lower end. When a Big Bro does get stuck, double-check that you have loosened the collar. A good karate chop from above onto the low end usually does the trick. Or try kicking it up from below the high end. In sandstone it might be useful to grab a water bottle and pour water on either end of the Big Bro to soften the sandstone and make the piece easier to remove.

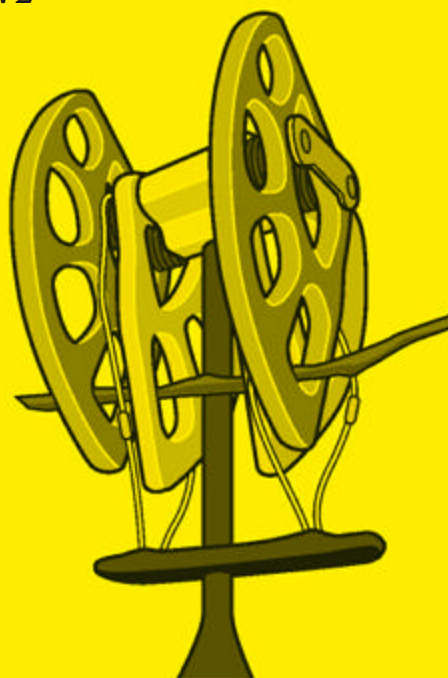
## RACKING

Keeping one side of your body in for an entire pitch makes racking easy, and choosing the correct side is a skill you'll develop with experience. If you can't tell which side is best or it looks like you might have to switch sides mid-pitch, rack on a shoulder sling so you can move gear from one side to another efficiently. Don't put extra runners over your gear sling, which might get tangled as you switch sides. Note that for more advanced, invert-style offwidths (feet over your head) a gear sling will fall over your head and is not recommended.

Offwidth pitches are often interspersed with wider "pods." It's can be the crux to get out of these dreaded pods, but you can take advantage of the time you spend stuck in there by pulling up (aka "tagging") more gear. If there appears to be a good stance in a pod or on a ledge partway into the pitch, planning to tag up gear is a great way to pare down your rack. There are two ways to do this. The first is to trail a lightweight tag line and haul up additional gear from a stance on the route or while clipped to a piece of gear. The second way is to use your lead rope. Ideally you will have a stance where you can clip directly into an intermediate anchor, and when your belayer takes you off belay, you can pull up a loop of rope and drop it so your belayer can attach the needed gear. After you have pulled up the gear, the belayer should quickly reel in the slack and put you back on belay. Use twigs as retaining pins in the lobes of your larger cams when

climbing (fig. 2), which will make your cumbersome rack sleeker. Avoid using a sharp pin or dowel that could potentially spear you in the thigh as you climb. Twigs are cheaper, readily available, and conveniently break before impaling you.

fig. 2



## Big Bro Tips

- ➔ The collar end of the Big Bro needs to be on the right side of the crack so that the rope running upward tightens, rather than loosens, the collar.
- ➔ Big Bros are ideal in parallel-sided cracks. Maximize surface contact with the rock, as with any other pro. When placed correctly, the inner tube (the right side) should be slightly lower.
- ➔ If possible, place Big Bros with constrictions below for added security, or in dishes within the crack.
- ➔ Do not waste energy on the "perfect" Big Bro placement. I've spent 30 minutes trying to get an ideal placement, only to have it fall out as soon as I started to climb. If you can't get the piece to sit properly, keep moving and try another location.
- ➔ Do not false-fire Big Bros! Place the silver end against the rock in the crack before you push the release button.
- ➔ Sling Big Bros with New England Ropes 5.5 Tech Cord, not 5mm accessory cord. Tech Cord is four times as strong. Length is a personal preference, but I like them to hang six to eight inches below my waist, preventing them from wedging behind my hips.
- ➔ Use Elmer's Slide-All Spray Lubricant to maintain springs.
- ➔ Keep in mind where you'll be climbing in a chimney. If moving deeper, pay attention to the direction of the force placed on the Big Bros, as it could pull them into a wider section where they might fall out.
- ➔ When racking, make sure they are fully retracted with the collar tightened so they don't accidentally expand mid-pitch directly into your knee, or worse.



# STRONGER HANDS AND FINGERS

By Dr. Lisa Erikson



## SIMPLE PUTTY EXERCISES STRENGTHEN SMALL BUT IMPORTANT MUSCLES

Using flexible putty as resistance training is ideal for hands and fingers. Similar to core training while sitting on an unstable ball, squeezing and kneading pliable putty forces those smaller, overlooked muscles in the hands and fingers to do their fair share of the work, which also mimics the endless variety of hold shapes and sizes you'll encounter when climbing. If your hands, fingers, and forearms are completely healthy, putty is perfect for improving muscular endurance.

It also can be great for recovering from injuries if you're at the right stage in the post-injury period—when you have no more pain and inflammation but feel weak or unstable when you climb. Just two weeks of these exercises can make a world of difference for your climbing.

## Start Here

Whether you just want stronger hands and fingers or want to get back on the wall after an injury, pick a light putty and go first for endurance. You will notice that it fatigues your hands fast. The goal is to strengthen your muscles or overcome your injury in a safe environment. For injuries that are normally tested by first dangling off a hangboard, this is a good intermediate step. The idea is that if you have to take time off while a finger problem heals, even two weeks of recovery can cause moderate atrophy of the forearm, finger, and hand muscles, not to mention a general weakening throughout your entire body. Starting with the lightest putty (we recommend Cando Theraputty, [massagewarehouse.com](http://massagewarehouse.com)), aim for two weeks of doing 10 minutes of exercises a day. If you're completely healthy, feel free to start with a denser putty, but still aim for 10 minutes a day. This will strengthen your hands as well as balance out the muscle tone missing from time off due to injury. Whether you're starting with the lightest putty post-injury or starting with an intermediate putty for overall improvement, always make sure to warm it up before using it. With post-injury work, let pain and inflammation be your guide. If your injury puffs up or swells, you did too much. If pain occurs but does not persist, or gets better as you do the work, you are usually OK. When in doubt, ask your doctor or back down to a lower-resistance putty.

## PUTTY HAND EXERCISES

- 1 Warm Up:** Always start by warming the putty up by kneading it with both hands, squeezing with each finger individually and together, pressing in, and pushing out (fig. 1).
- 2 Can Opener Twists:** Roll your putty up into a log and try to twist the top off (fig. 2). Do this 15 times working left, 15 times working right, and then switch hands. Once you can do 15 times each way easily, aim for 1.5 minutes for each direction. If that's too easy, grab denser putty. This one is pretty basic, but it's excellent for new climbers and anyone with wrist injuries.
- 3 Ball Explosions:** Ball up the putty and push your fingers into it, working to open them in two ways: starting with bent fingers (fig. 3) or straight fingers (fig. 4) and then expanding them. This works muscle groups on the back of your forearm, the extensors and the abductors.
- 4 Roll Squashes:** Twist the putty into a long torpedo shape, then pinch it flat between the thumb and each finger (fig. 5). Remake it into that log shape and pinch it flat between the thumb and each finger again. Pay attention to which fingers fatigue faster than the rest. Focus on making those digits stronger. Getting any muscle shake? That's great. This means the muscles are learning and getting healthily fatigued, and this is the best time to teach proper movement patterns.
- 5 Crimp Pinches:** Make a torpedo again, but bigger than before, about  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to  $\frac{3}{4}$ " in diameter. Place it across your fingers' last crease, just under the tip with palm up. Now roll your fingers over to squeeze the tube against the base of your fingers (fig. 6).
- 6 Web Squeezes:** Roll it into a long tube and hold it so it's hanging straight down. With the other hand palm down, squeeze the putty with the webbing of your fingers, working the whole way down the putty (fig. 7). Reshape and move to the next finger. Do a second round with a fatter tube.

fig. 1



fig. 2





fig. 3



fig. 4



fig. 5



fig. 7



fig. 6



## Goals of Putty Use

- ➔ Strengthens the smaller muscles of the hand (lumbrical and interossei muscles) in a safe and focused environment that reduces the possibility of injury.
- ➔ Focuses on your weaknesses, like correcting muscle imbalances, increasing strength and end range of motion, and improving overall range of motion.
- ➔ Decreases forearm and finger fatigue; a targeted way to gain more endurance in muscles that are often overlooked while climbing.
- ➔ Increases and improves finger-joint stability and biomechanics, including decreasing the risk of harmful abnormal motion during climbing due to wrist fatigue and weakness.
- ➔ Safe beginning for loading joints on pinches or crimps, particularly post-injury.
- ➔ Healthy transition from full rest to climbing; reduces risk of re-injury or prolonging current problems.
- ➔ Great way for beginner and intermediate climbers to strengthen fingers to prepare for more intense hangboard or systems board training.

## Doctor's Note

Any lasting pain? You need to do more rehab before climbing on it. Fatigue but no pain? Good. Keep going. Continuously roll and pinch the putty, working all the fingers and aiming for about 1.5 minutes per exercise. This will give you stamina and strength.



### LISA ERIKSON

Dr. Lisa Erikson is a chiropractor who works with pro climbers at her practice LifeSport Chiropractic (lifesportchiro.com) in Boulder, Colorado. Her new book is *Climbing Injuries Solved* (climbinginjuriesolved.com), 200 pages that will help you prevent and treat common climbing injuries. It's available as an e-book (\$35.50) or in print (\$45.50), and a portion of the proceeds will benefit the American Safe Climbing Association.



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# Ask Answer Man

He knows climbing. And he knows it.

➔ The misogyny in the gym is crazy. I'm flattered, but seriously, I'm here to train. How can I exude that without sounding like a bitch?

—Toni L., New York, NY

Us fellas are basic creatures, stimulated by the visceral, so short of wearing an Everest down suit to the gym, I'm afraid you won't be able to stop the staring. What you might be able to do, however, is mitigate the face-to-face interactions that your incredulity makes you averse to endure. Keep in mind, however, that it is not Answer Man's opinion that you should HAVE to do these things, and the unfairness of it all is, of course, tragic. But to protect my own fine keister and because my own rugged good looks are more of an acquired taste, I'm employing the sage wisdom of one, Ms. Answer Man.

- For starters, be a lady, like me. You know what uncovered flesh does to bird-brained men. Utilize wicking garment technology instead of stripping to your skivvies.
- Headphones and no eye contact: If you're really there to train, then do just that. Don't give anyone an opening to drop a poorly placed, "Come here often?"
- Avoid peak hours. It'll be much less likely that a guy will follow you around the gym like a lost puppy if you're the only two people there.
- Focus on roped climbing. Climb with a partner and be nowhere near the swarms of socially inept, over (under?) sexed, skinny-jeaned boulderers.
- Do the same stuff you do everywhere else to deflect attention. (For a hottie like yourself, the gym can't possibly be the only place this happens.)
- Politely decline help, company, chalk, beta, brushing, spots, high fives, and other advances.
- Don't mistake actual kindness for sexual interest. Not every dude is into you.

➔ I hate bars, trail mix, and gas station food. Any recommendations for energy snacks that won't make me feel like a rabbit or an ultrarunner?

—Matt T., Mobile, AL

Aw, little baby needs his adventure vittles to be food and not just fuel. First, let's clear something up. Food isn't deodorant. There isn't "all-day" anything, anywhere. You can't just eat one thing and be set. That's why me and my iron-clad innards toss a couple Egg McMuffins down the tubes on my way to Sendville. You probably don't like that McIdea, but if you can stand to spend some time in your own kitchen, go to [climbing.com/nutrition](http://climbing.com/nutrition) for some recipes from Skratz Labs. Those nerds are always cooking up something tasty with a nutritional benefit to match. Of course, if you don't want to commit to that much time in your kitchen, you can get their newest product, the aptly named Cookie Mix. (Seriously, who doesn't like cookies?) All you need is a stick of butter, an egg, and some dried fruit or nuts to toss in the mix. Drop it in the oven and what comes out will be delicious, have the same nutritional content as any of those bland-o-bars you find in the supermarket, and have a nice high moisture content, making it easier to eat. I mean, they're cookies. Seems pretty simple to me.

➔ Why are gyms so freaking expensive, and why do I have to take a belay test at every damn one?

—Sam C., Salt Lake City, UT

Unlike the delusional yet well-meaning masses who purchase gym memberships and don't even visit their fitness establishments, climbers are of the obnoxious ilk that actually attend to their own physical needs with dedication and aplomb. Because of this attendance addiction, climbing gyms have to account for constant abuse of their equipment. Have you bought climbing holds or bouldering mats or ropes or belay devices or steel anchor biners or fixed draws or all of that for an entire city of climbers who descend upon your home to use them every single day? What you need to remember, fair climber, is that your climbing gym is not expensive for what it offers. It also must pay setters to keep you entertained, the liability insurance it takes to keep it within the law of the land, the desk folks who tend to your needs, the yoga teachers, ab/core class leaders, managers, utilities, and hand sanitizer. Actually, it's a heck of a deal. If you disagree, then build your own. As for the belay test, well, it's got to do with the fact that most people can't put on a harness without tangling their leg loops, much less ensure the safe air-to-ground passage of a human being that's connected to them only through a narrow strip of nylon.

AND OTHER TOPICS...

What are the best ice tools? The tongs that drop ice cubes into lowballs. // What's your stance on weed and climbing? What are you, 12? // Who is Ms. Answer Man? Your mom. (No really, ask her.) // Do you think I could pull off bro-tanks? He'll probably fight, but I believe in you.





# The BY CEDAR WRIGHT One Rule



“THERE IS ONLY ONE rule in ice climbing,” Conrad Anker said, with an intensely furrowed brow: “Do not fall.” Then he solemnly patted the ice axes crossed against my chest.

Conrad, a true alpine climbing legend and de facto captain of the The North Face climbing team, which I had just recently joined, had given me the high honor of accompanying him to Nepal to do some first ascent ice climbing and to assist with the Khumbu Climbing School, an organization he started to teach Sherpas climbing skills, many of whom had summited Everest but couldn’t even tie a figure eight.

I had never ice climbed in my life, but I believed I was indestructible. Something as basic as ice climbing should be a walk in the park, right?

To train for our foray, I met Conrad at the Ouray Ice

Festival in Ouray, Colorado, where he got me up to speed on the basics of ice. This entailed such niceties as getting hit in the face by ice shrapnel and laboring to put in ice screws that had the distinct possibility of ripping out if you fell on them! I also had the pleasure of experiencing my first “screaming barfies,” the excruciating pain of blood rushing back into one’s frozen fingers. My initial read on ice climbing was that it took all the worst parts of free soloing and aid climbing and wrapped them up into a single, horrific, soul-scarring exercise. I secretly wondered what the hell I’d gotten myself into, while outwardly projecting a false aura of confidence. I mean, this shit was easy—every hold’s a jug! Folks who knew me back then often described me with unflattering adjective-noun combinations, such as “sketchy knucklehead” or even “cocky dumbass.” And I would soon learn why.



We landed in Kathmandu and met up with our group of Khumbu Climbing School volunteers: fellow TNF athlete Heidi Wirtz, bestselling author John Krakauer, climbing guide Adam Knoff, and young ice climbing prodigy Ross Lynn. After a rickety, death trap of a plane landed us on the small, steep, and notoriously dangerous strip of runway in Lukla, we set off on foot for Namche Bazaar where Conrad assured us there was world-class ice climbing to be had.

Conrad is notorious for having an ascetic's love of suffering, and one of his go-to expedition maneuvers was to keep food to a minimum. He believes that the modern comforts of the Western world make us soft, and he looks at these trips as a way to toughen back up. While the rest of us enjoyed the luxury of letting Sherpas carry in our climbing gear, Conrad proudly carried a heavy load and each morning handed out two Snickers bars, our daily rations.

Once we settled in at Namche, it became quickly apparent that given my lack of ice experience, I would be the odd man out, the equivalent of the kid who gets picked last in gym class. While Conrad and Krakauer sharpened their tools and got ready to climb *Losar*, a 2,000-foot waterfall that we could see from the window of our lodge, I kicked about until eventually Ross and Heidi reluctantly agreed to invite me on a recon for some first ascent ice. "Be safe and remember the one rule," Conrad said to me as he patted me roughly on the shoulder.

Early the next morning Ross, Heidi, and I saddled our packs and headed up to where we had heard there were some impressive unclimbed ice flows across the river. I coveted first ascent glory and really wanted to be seen as a badass. A couple hours later, an impressive ribbon of ice came into view. "There's our line," I declared with no real clue if it was, in fact, climbable.

"I don't know; it looks kind of messed up," Heidi said. "It doesn't even go to the ground. I think there might be water flowing behind it."

"It'll be fine," I said, strong-arming the situation, assuring everyone that it was an awesome idea to go for this barely formed waterfall.

When we were standing at the base of the climb, things didn't look promising. The ice didn't start for about 150 feet and was protected by a Jenga puzzle of loose rock and frozen moss. Where Heidi and Ross saw an ice climb that wasn't in, I saw a glorious first ascent waiting to be plucked, and somehow I convinced them. Ross tiptoed his way up pitch one to a sloping snow ledge, and then Heidi climbed a thin smear of ice up to an alcove. "The anchor is super sketchy, so try not to fall," Heidi yelled down.

When we reached Heidi, she had a No. 4 Camalot with three lobes touching the rock, a hummock of moss slung with a cordelette, and a stubby ice screw. "Your lead," Ross laughed.

I ran it out 20 feet, then managed to get a sling around a small runnel of ice about the size of my wrist. My crampons, which I would later find out were a failed prototype, gave me little purchase. I was essentially campusing. Another 20 feet out, the ice was getting really thin. I was already pumped. I pounded frantically to get a stick, then water began shooting out of the hole I had created—straight into my face and down my sleeves. I desperately tried to put in an ice screw; it went in halfway then hit rock. Too pumped to tie it off short where the screw met the ice, I clipped the hanger, which was sticking four inches out from the ice!

Above me was a final overhanging headwall and then an enticing sloping ledge where I hoped to relieve my arms. With the pump-clock ticking, I trembled my way out the overhang with my feet skittering uselessly. I was so flamed, but just two more moves and I was over the hump and back on my feet. I attempted to place an ice screw, but dropped it. Fuck! Now, horribly runout, I had nowhere to go but up. I pounded at the ice, but it just kept shearing off and smashing me in

the face. A sizeable chunk ripped my forehead open, and an alarming mix of blood and sweat dripped into my eyes. I entered survival mode. One more swing and my axe finally stuck. With next to nothing left in the tank, I committed to the placement. I locked off, walked my feet up, and then *CHICKCRACKKKKK!* The ice sheared. And I was airborne.

My life did not flash before my eyes, but time did slow down. I saw the rope snaking wildly through the air. I watched my shadow moving in an abstract splotch down the frozen waterfall. I saw my only ice screw rip right out. As I fell past Ross and Heidi, I could see their eyes widen with disbelief.

I cartwheeled my arms to try to stay upright and in the process hucked my ice tools off the cliff into the river. I took a breath and screamed before I hit the snowy, sloping ledge at the top of pitch one. With the rope still slack, I tomahawked head over heels like a wrecked skier, and then without the rope ever going tight, I skidded to a halt.

"Oh my God! Cedar, are you alright?" Heidi screamed with a tone that suggested she thought I was dead. I twitched to life and began to assess my body. I lifted each hand up and stared at it wondrously. I moved my legs, and they seemed OK. I slowly sat up, half expecting my spine to crumple under my weight, but aside from the cut on my forehead, I seemed to be fine. I sprang up and raised my arms in a "V" for victory and screamed "I'm alive!" I had whipped two pitches and decked!

Back at the lodge, we met up with Conrad and John who had just climbed *Losar*. They both frowned and shook their heads at me like I had just shat the bed. "You broke the rule," Conrad said. "The ONE rule."

"What would have happened if you broke your legs, or worse, died? How would that have looked for an instructor of the climbing school to have to be rescued or buried?" John said. I shrunk sheepishly into the corner like a bad dog. Ross and Heidi made plans to climb the next day without me. I was officially a liability.

I had a rest day by myself while the remainder of the team went out to climb. By the afternoon, I had eaten my Snickers rations and was anxious, hungry, and lonely. I went over to Conrad's duffel to grab a file to sharpen my crampons, when I noticed a bag of homemade jerky. I grabbed a chunk and gnawed on it as I rifled through the bag looking for the file. At that exact moment, Conrad and the gang came tromping through the door. My mouth gaped, and the jerky dropped to the ground. "What do you think you're doing?" Conrad grumbled and for the rest of the evening didn't say another word to me. I was mortified but had a catharsis: My ego had run away with my logic.

The next morning I ate oatmeal in silent misery, expecting another day of dejection. "Gear up, Cedar," Conrad said. "Take these crampons. I think they are going to treat you a lot better." I held the crampons, knowing they represented a second chance. Conrad took me under his wing, and I was soon leading steep, technical ice. By the time the climbing school started, I was fully integrated back into the family, and being in Nepal with the Sherpa climbers and sharing the joy of climbing with them was a transformational experience. After the school I even managed to climb *Losar* with Adam in record time. I had redeemed myself and learned one of the most valuable lessons of my life: humility.

Years later, I headed back to the Khumbu Climbing School, and in between sessions, Conrad invited me to come up to Everest basecamp to retrieve some memory cards containing climate data. As we sat on a rock enjoying the pristine beauty of the Himalaya, Conrad pulled some homemade jerky out of his pack, and then passed me a piece.

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*Cedar Wright is a contributing editor, sketchy knucklehead, and cocky dumbass for Climbing magazine.*



BY BRENDAN LEONARD

# Good Days On Bad Routes



IN THE DEPTHS OF WINTER, when the sun sets at 4:15, you get some time to reflect. A few months ago, as we sought to eke out one more day climbing rock in the alpine before the inevitable snow, Hilary and I left our Denver apartment at 4 a.m. We walked through the dark alley behind our residence, light rack in my pack and rope in Hilary's, balancing our coffee on the way to the car that was parked on a side street off Colfax. Neither of us talked as we stepped past the back of the building where six to 10 homeless folks slept every night—it was very early in the morning, the middle of the precious few hours when the streets are somewhat quiet, after the partiers have gone home but before the city has woken up to go to work.

They'd been living behind the building since we moved in two months prior, drinking until they fell asleep every night, heading out to find money or work during the day, pulling the occasional mattress out of a dumpster and stashing it behind the building.

Nothing makes you feel fortunate like walking to your car for a day in the mountains and being within a couple feet of people who may never have been "camping," but sleep outside due to necessity, maybe because things just don't come together for them like they do for us or maybe because of mental illness, addiction, or something else.

Hilary and I had a great day in the Indian Peaks, climbing the *North Ridge* (5.6 R) of Mt. Toll. She had her first-ever alpine lead, and with a little cleaning, I tacked on an

extra pitch to the summit with a 5.7ish hand crack. The dark clouds rolling in from the west parted around the summit to the north and south, and we saw a handful of marmots on the descent. The route, which had been my first-ever alpine climb seven years ago, was a bit chossier than I remembered, and really, kind of a long walk in for three pitches. But the fun last pitch and Hilary taking the rack for her first route-finding experience in the mountains made it worth it.

I recently heard a couple people mention that they had a "shitty climbing year" last year, and the first time I heard it, it didn't register. But the second time, I thought, "Whoa, is this a thing?" And I thought about my past year. I didn't climb as hard or as often as I could have—which is the case every year—and I felt a little guilty for that. I didn't get several climbs checked off my tick list for various reasons. But I didn't think of it as a bad year. But maybe I'm still too new, still too stoked to climb whatever I can, if I can.

A couple times I climbed *The Ridge* on the Piz Badile near Nederland, Colorado, a five-pitch 5.8 that's mostly a 5.5 ridge scramble, choosing to include it in a guidebook of easy trad climbs I was coauthoring. A friend climbed the route and reported back that it wasn't all that exciting. I second-guessed its inclusion in the guidebook (as well as my taste in climbing routes), then tried to sell it to my friend: "As a climb, maybe it's two stars, but as a mountaineering adventure with a 10-minute approach, it's four stars. Right? I mean, it's 700 feet of alpine climbing right next to the highway."



If you read enough route descriptions on Mountain Project, you're bound to find some pithy comments about a particular climb being so-so except for that one good pitch or "It's not all that classic," or "It's overrated." This is how people guide others to better-quality climbs—the three- and four-star routes—instead of wasting time on routes that get only one star, or even worse, the ominous "bomb" designation. This is fair. Mountain Project is an online guidebook, as well as something of a Yelp for climbers. But I remember the epiphany I had after my first four or so years as a climber: I could potentially have an absolute blast on a route that a bunch of people thought sucked. And I have, several times.

Everyone's entitled to his or her opinion of a route, and sometimes routes are objectively shitty. But that doesn't mean you can't have a four-star day on a climb that only merits one or two stars, or an absolutely wonderful year of climbing non-classics. Hell, the "No-Star Tuesday" group in Salt Lake City has probably never had a bad after-work outing, and their entire purpose is to climb the worst routes in the Wasatch.

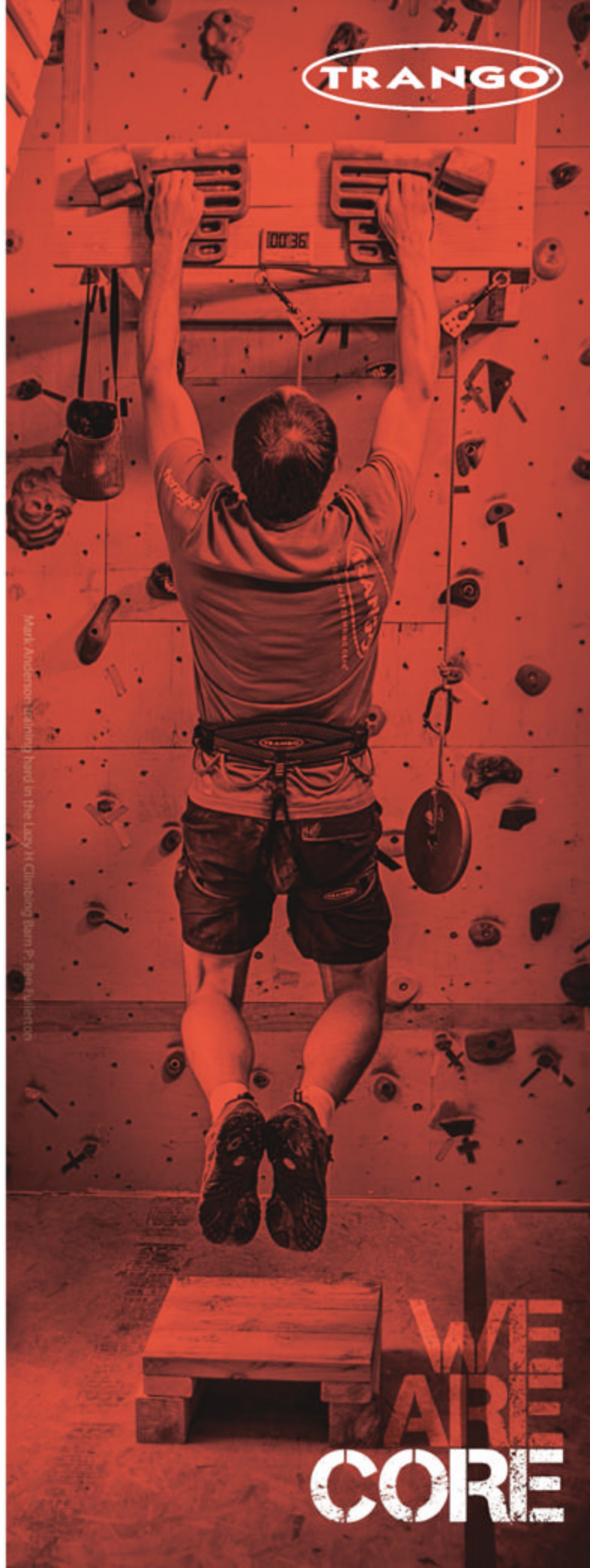
Maybe it's overly optimistic to say that there's no such thing as a shitty climbing year, that if you get out at all, if you're climbing rocks for fun, you've got a pretty good life. I'm sure some of the people sleeping on cardboard boxes behind my apartment building can't even imagine a life like that.

*Brendan Leonard is a contributing editor for Climbing. He lives in relentless pursuit of 5, fun and writes at [semi-rad.com](http://semi-rad.com).*



Hilary Oliver squeezes four stars of fun out of a two-and-a-half star route.

BRENDAN LEONARD





# The Stone Monkeys

In trying to define one of Yosemite's most storied subcultures, two documentarians find that it's signature characteristics are held close to the vest.

BY DAVE DAVIS AND MARY GRANDELIS



WE WERE DEEP into research and filming for a documentary that will eventually air on PBS. We decided to call the film “El Cap Report,” so named for a popular blog of the same name that the central character, Tom Evans, maintains. In talking to Tom, we found something really interesting, a chance to look around inside a wild subculture, or in this especially unique case, a subculture within a subculture—Yosemite’s Stone Monkeys.

Finding these little sects can be a defining moment for both a film being made as well as for the filmmaker personally. It’s one of the reasons we make documentaries to begin with. To stay inside our own little world may well be safer, but it can also be limiting as well as downright boring. To push the boundaries of what it means to be alive is not as safe, for sure, but it’s a hell of a lot more fun. Getting to know some Stone Monkeys helped remind us of this. It also became a defining moment for our film, “El Cap Report.”

Tom Evans was our gateway into the Monkey lifestyle, but he’d be the first to say that he’s not a Stone Monkey—or Rock Monkey, as a few prefer—or our favorite: Stoned Monkey. But through him, we met Cedar Wright who hauled us over to the El Cap Meadow to introduce us to Aaron Jones ([www.climbing.com/stone-monkeys](http://www.climbing.com/stone-monkeys)). We didn’t know it then, but Cedar and Aaron were part of a very informal, loose and somewhat selective group of people who lived the Monkey lifestyle.



Climber Aaron Jones giving a monkey call from atop El Cap.



Defining “Monkey” is tricky, given there are no clearly delineated rules in Monkey-land. Rules themselves would be counter to the nature of Monkey-ness. Later, during an interview, we asked Aaron to define “Monkey” and the lifestyle. He didn’t want to even try. Then, he became downright frustrated when we started asking him things like, “Well, is so-and-so a Monkey?” Who was he to determine what the Monkey lifestyle was, or who was a “member” he said. Aaron was, of course, being quite true to Monkey nature. He wouldn’t be caught in the trap of spelling out a lifestyle that defies both societal standards and easy definition.

Given all this, Aaron, and eventually Lori Butz, Corbin Usinger, Richie Copeland, Hugo Langel van Ervan, Nicola Martinez, Allisyn Beisner-Martinez, Ivo Ninov, Dean Fidelman, Ammon McNeely and a host of others allowed us that look inside to observe, in part at least, what it means to be living the dream as a Rock Monkey.

This led to several climbing, high-lining, slacking, and “office” outings over several years that produced over a hundred hours of footage. Ironically perhaps, the word “Monkey” is never mentioned in the finished film. How could we possibly try to interpret or pigeon-hole something that they themselves had trouble defining? Instead, we let what we believe to be the essence of the Monkey lifestyle permeate the film and help guide it.

Ammon McNeely is one Monkey who plays a large role in the film. We’ve often said that he gives the film its heart and soul. His wild nature, openness, generosity and even his moodiness had such an impact on us and on the film that we’re comfortable in our belief that the Monkeys are well represented in our work.

Guys like Ammon help set the standards of Monkey behavior. By their actions, they demonstrate some of the values of the Monkeys: freedom; hard climbing; periodic if not continuous dirtbagging; blatant disregard for conventional values; perhaps even a completely different outlook of what it means to be alive. And now that Rock Monkey has morphed into Flying Monkey, some adding in the willingness to fling yourself off of high places.

Nick Martinez and Allisyn Beisner-Martinez’s wedding in Yosemite Valley is in the film and so is their honeymoon climb of the Muir Wall. These two allowed us to represent the Monkey lifestyle well without actually and directly discussing it. “Show it, don’t tell it” worked for



Nick Martinez and Allisyn Beisner-Martinez after a honeymoon climb on the Muir Wall.

us here because showing it is so much easier than discussing it. To us, reality TV pales in comparison to the very real, intimate, honest and often touching footage of Nick and Al. Whether it’s hanging out on their portaledge or shaking some gear, their footage demonstrates Monkey-life better than a million words.

Having said all that, we’ve created a scene of outtakes from our film ([climbing.com/elcapreportmonkeys](http://climbing.com/elcapreportmonkeys)) that attempts to discuss Monkey lifestyle more directly than the film itself does. But because of the terms of our film permit with the National Park Service, we’ve had to exclude a couple of the scenes that we shot that would be even more revealing of the lifestyle. For example, during an interview with an infamous Monkey at Taft Point overlooking El Capitan, the guy begins the interview by smoking a bowl defiantly, a scene that we explicitly can’t show without violating the constraints of that permit.

Yet drugs are an undeniable part of the Monkey culture, set in stone with route names on El Cap: *Magic Mushroom*, *Tangerine Trip*, and *Mescalito*. Our guy at Taft Point told us stories of the Stonemaster, predecessors to the Monkeys, from back in the day; such a rich history with a clear connection to today. But we didn’t want to land our Monkey at Taft Point in jail. That’d be too confining for a Yosemite Stone Monkey.

Dave Davis and his partner Mary Grandelis filmed the documentary “El Cap Report,” which will air on PBS. [elcapreportthefilm.com](http://elcapreportthefilm.com).







Dodging ghosts, rocks, and weather in  
Switzerland's Val Bregaglia

By Brendan Leonard  
Photos by Dan Patitucci

# The Alpine Pursuit of



Thirteen pitches of easy  
slab climbing on *Bugel-  
eisen* (5.8), a perfect  
ridgeline in the Sciora  
Group of Switzerland.



When it comes to long, easy climbing, I'm something of an aficionado. Climb a moderate all the way to the clouds? I'm in.

Nothing in the world compares to the *North Ridge* of the Piz Badile. It's 3,000 feet of 5.6, with 24 bolted belays, up a granite ridge that drops off to a glacier on each side. I imagined starting from the Sasc Fura hut in the morning, topping out, walking off the summit into Italy, sleeping in a hut, and then walking back into Switzerland the next day to head back down to our car. It would be the highlight of my summer, maybe my year.

We have fun long climbs in the U.S., I know. I've done lots of them. The Piz Badile dwarfs them all. It's four Cathedral Peaks stacked on top of each other, or two-and-a-half *Solar Slabs*, three First Flatirons. It is the El Cap of 5.fun. You hardly even have to take a rack.

It's classic, and it sits next to another classic. On the northeast face of the Badile, climber's left of the *North Ridge*, lies the *Cassin Route*, a 22-pitch 5.10b, one of the Six Great North Faces of the Alps, first climbed in 1937 by legendary Italian alpinist Riccardo Cassin, and then ticked off by pretty much every big-name alpinist in Europe over the next two decades.

But wait, there's more.

In the very next valley to the east, a two-hour walk from the base of the Piz Badile, sits the Sciora Group, a set of toothy granite peaks with an



Sport climbing on a large boulder at sunset in the Sciora Group.

embarrassing amount of fun climbs: a 26-pitch bolted 5.9 over here, a 14-pitch bolted 5.7 over there, a 13-pitch bolted 5.8, and a 22-pitch 5.10c with bolted belays. All of this within a 90-minute approach of a hut perched right in the middle, with a stunning view, hot food, and cold beer. Plenty of reasons in both valleys, collectively known as the Bregaglia, to fly across the Atlantic. But that one, the *North Ridge* of the Badile—holy shit, that was what sold me.

I looked at photos of the ridge, not to study it, but to get excited by imagining myself romping up it with a rack of draws and a few nuts and cams clipped to my harness. Photographer Dan Patitucci said come on over to Switzerland, we'll go to the Bregaglia, bring Hilary, and we'll get Simon Duverney, the young, stoked, and hilarious French mountain guide we hung out with last summer. It will be fun. I bought the expensive plane tickets without a second thought. Can you really put a price on a memory like that?





Hiking into the beautiful  
Sciara range.





Simon Duverney on the West Ridge of the Innominata in bad weather.



Checking out an old guidebook in the comfy Sciora hut.



A group of friends shares a hot meal after a long day of fun climbing.

We hiked up the Val Bondasca to the Sciora hut in the humid air, under clouds obscuring the peaks above, grinding up a steep trail that gains 2,700 feet in less than two miles. The clouds dissipated enough to reveal the mountains just as I saw the hut for the first time. It was a building big enough to house 42 people, and it looked like a dollhouse beneath the Sciora peaks looming 3,500 feet above its roof.

Walter Bonatti, who spent a decade and a half climbing in the Alps, the Himalaya, and Patagonia, wrote in his memoir, *Mountains of My Life*: “The whole Bregaglia is wonderful, but among the valleys that converge on it is one most dear to mountaineers, the Val Bondasca. It begins at the little village of Bondo on the left-hand slope, then rises, fantastic as a fairytale, to the foot of some of the greatest granite colossi in the Alps. What mountaineer has not at least dreamt of knowing the clear faces of the Badile, the Cengalo, Gemelli, Sciora, Trubinasca, and many other peaks?”

Fantastic as a fuckin’ fairytale indeed, Mr. Bonatti. A brook winds through giant boulders to the back of the Sciora hut, which looks like it’s been built as close to the mountains as possible, and a few feet from where the biggest chunks of granite stopped rolling after they cleaved off the peaks above. I stood behind the hut wondering for just a second what the odds were of a house-sized boulder toppling off the 10,397-foot Sciora Dafora and rolling down 3,000 feet of talus and smashing the hut like a giant foot stomping on a Cocoa Puff. Then I blinked it out of my brain, glanced up at the huge peaks and thought, *This is going to be fun.*

I have almost no suspicion thus far that I am about to be taught a life lesson about expectations as a climber.

“The whole Bregaglia is wonderful, but among the valleys that converge on it is one most dear to mountaineers, the Val Bondasca. It begins at the little village of Bondo on the left-hand slope, then rises, fantastic as a fairytale, to the foot of some of the greatest granite colossi in the Alps.”



The 22-pitch slab route *Punta Pioda* (5.7), above the Val Bregaglia, Switzerland.





## + Switzerland

Our entire time in Switzerland, all the locals talked about was the weather. So much rain, they said. People would greet each other on the street and you could count down the seconds until someone mentioned the rain. No one had a good summer—mountain guides, paraglider pilots, photographers. When we arrived in August, no one had summited the Eiger via the *Mittellegi Ridge*, the trade route to the top, all year. Photographer Keith Ladzinski happened to be in Switzerland at the same time, and posted on Instagram, “The locals told us that it’s been the wettest summer in 50 years.” We could sit around and wait for the weather to improve, which it likely wouldn’t, or go try to force some climbing. Our loose plan: Hike into the Sciora hut, climb a couple routes, move our stuff to the Sasc Fura hut, climb the Badile, and walk out to the car the same day.

By the time we got to the Sciora hut, the staff there said that only a couple climbs were dry. We headed for the *Bugeleisen*, a 1,000-foot 13-pitch bolted route up Pizzi Gemelli that was about as pleasant an intro to the area as you could ask for: incredible views to either side, slabby 5.8 granite, straightforward raps down the route to descend, and the biggest rockfall I’ve ever seen ripping off the face of the neighboring east wall of Piz Cengalo.

Dan had said that in the Sciora hut, you can hear the low rumbles of rockfall throughout the night—and I did. And then during most of the days, too. Based on my time in the Bregaglia, I’d say that if you got to the Sciora hut, bought two beers, went outside, and drank them at a normal pace, you’d hear rockfall at least once. Not that the climbing routes are dangerous—most of the classic routes are on solid granite. The rockfall comes from the other faces. For instance, the standard route on Piz Cengalo, the *Gaïser-Lehman* (or NW Pillar), a 3,000-foot trad 5.8, heads up the north wall of the peak, around the corner from the side of the mountain where we saw a bus-sized block drop off.

Dan and I chatted at the top of our last pitch on the *Bugeleisen*, waiting for Simon and Hilary to finish the pitch. I heard the tap-tap-tap of some gravel sliding down the south face of Cengalo, and then turned to look over my shoulder and see a 20’ x 20’ section slide off, drop 500 feet down, and explode on the glacier below, sending a cloud of gray dust 300 feet wide and 100 feet tall up in the air just below us.

As an American, whenever I see bolted belays or multiple bolted pitches on the “plaisir” (pleasure) climbs in Swiss guidebooks, I relax a little. No funky gear (or no gear at all sometimes), minimal route-finding issues, and maybe a whole day on a 1,000-foot climb with hardly any worries besides whether or not I can pull the moves. Since we have so relatively



If easy ridge climbs aren’t your thing, there are some harder challenges on the smaller rocks.



The North Ridge of the Piz Badile stands out in the background.



## BREGAGLIA CLASSICS

The 9 routes you need to add to your tick list

From the Sasc Fura hut:

### **Nordkante, Piz Badile**

24 pitches, 5a+

Bolts and gear

Only 5.6, but requires a descent off the south side of the peak into Italy, and a lengthy hike back over to Switzerland the next day. Or four to six hours of rappels.

### **Cassin, Piz Badile**

22 pitches, 5c+

Bolts and gear

The most famous route in the Bregaglia, a full-on alpine rock route, the *Cassin* is rarely 100% dry, and is still a testpiece for alpinists.

From the Sciora hut:

### **Gaiser-Lehman/NW Pillar, Piz Cengalo**

29 pitches, 5b, gear

With, no bolted belays, this 3,000-foot route is set back at a friendly angle and is an area classic, but less popular than the *Cassin* or the *Nordkante*.

### **Bugeleisen, Pizzi Gemelli**

13 to 14 pitches, 5a+

Bolts and a small rack

A great intro to the area, it's a

romp up 13 pitches of mellow slab climbing.

### **West Ridge, Torre Innominata**

13 pitches, 5b+ or 4c A0 (bolted)

A fun climb up a moderate ridge, but a serious descent down an often snowy, and sometimes loose, couloir.

### **Via Noemi, Torre Innominata**

6 pitches, 6a+ or 5c+ A0

A more recent (1997) area classic with great positioning, but it's less committing than longer routes in the area. Mostly bolted, with an easy descent.

### **Direct Integrale, Sciora Dafora**

22 pitches, 6c (6 A1)

Bolts and gear

A mostly 5.9 and easier route with three 5.10b to 5.10d pitches up high, on a scenic arête to the summit of Sciora Dafora.

### **Piodakante/NW Ridge, Punta Pioda, 5b**

26 pitches, 6b or 5c A0

Bolts and gear

Another area classic, and an enormous completely bolted climb, with one A0 move over a large, usually dripping-wet overhang.

### **Kasper Pillar, Ago di Sciora**

6 pitches, 5b, bolts and gear

A steep, fun, half-day climb to the top of an aesthetic (but smaller) Sciora peak.



few long bolted routes in the U.S., I get a kid-in-a-candy-store feeling to look at a book full of Swiss routes that all promise a full day out and nothing but a rack of quickdraws on your harness.

The Bregaglia, however, is far from a carefree playground. There's rock-fall, bad weather, and plenty of opportunities to get in over your head. Marcello Negrini, 64, and Vittorio Scartazinni, 27, are the local crew of Rega, the nationwide Swiss air rescue service, and they perform about 15 helicopter rescues per summer in the Bregaglia. Mostly, they say, the rescued parties underestimate the length of the routes, or don't have the endurance, or see a bad weather forecast and decide to go up anyway. Both men have been climbing in the Bregaglia since they were 8 years old, a total of more than seven decades of experience between them.

"Because of the Badile and Cengalo, it's our Yosemite," Negrini says.

Only one English guidebook for the area is available, and it's quite erratically written. The author has evidently done some of the climbs in the book, but is happy to quote others' trip reports at length in route descriptions. Some climbs have notes on what gear to bring, and others have zero mention of whether they're bolted or gear routes. The other Bregaglia guidebooks are either in German or Italian, and often have rather large discrepancies in ratings and number of pitches.

Our second day had a rather spotty weather forecast, so we picked another easy climb, the *West Ridge* of Torre Innominata, which one guidebook said was a 10-pitch 5a (5.7) and another said was a 13-pitch 5b+ (5.8). We spent the day climbing into and through a cloud, a light mist covering the rock. We found 14 bolted belays, and a stout 5.10 layback move at the start of one of the upper pitches.

The history of climbing in the Bregaglia dates back to the 1800s. The high passes, such as the Cacciabella Pass (9,500 feet) were used by Italian smugglers bringing tobacco into Switzerland far in advance of the first for-pleasure climbing in the area. In 1867, American W.A.B. Coolidge made the first ascent of the Piz Badile by its south ridge with French guides François Devouassoud and Henri Devouassoud, which the Swiss Alpine Club called "the beginning of serious rock climbing



## Beta

**Getting there** Fly to Zurich, then take a train to St. Moritz, and a bus to Bondo. From Bondo, either hut is a 3.5-hour hike (but if you can catch a ride with a passing car, the hike is 1.5 to 2 hours). St. Moritz is the best bet for groceries.

**Stay** For access to Piz Badile routes, bunk at **Capanna di Sciora** (\$64 per night, including breakfast and dinner). Contact the hut guardian, Barbara Hofmeister Salis, at +41 81 822 19 68 or [sciora.cap@bluewin.ch](mailto:sciora.cap@bluewin.ch). For access to all routes not on Piz Badile, stay at **Capanna Sasc Furä** (\$60 per night, including breakfast and dinner). Contact the hut warden, Heidi Altweger, at +41 (0)81 822 12 52 or [info@sascfura.ch](mailto:info@sascfura.ch).

**Guidebook** The best English guidebook, providing a useful overview of the area's most classic routes, is *Bregaglia Climbing: Sciora & Badile*, by Chris Mellor. Download a PDF at [needlesports.com](http://needlesports.com) for \$11.

**Guide** Get pointed in the right direction with Alti Planet guide Simon Duverney. He's IFMGA-certified, fluent in English, and 2013's mixed climbing champion at the Ouray Ice Festival ([altiplanet.fr](http://altiplanet.fr)).

in the district." In the 1890s, a Swiss guide named Christian Klucker was hired by Russian photographer and writer Anton von Rydzewski to help him explore the region. Although history would reflect that the two men quite despised each other, they teamed up for dozens of ascents, including many first ascents of peaks and routes in the Bregaglia: Pizzi Gemelli, Sciora di Fuori, Punta Pioda, *West Ridge* of Piz Badile, *North Face* of Piz Cengalo, *West Arête* of Punta Trubinasca, *South Ridge* of Sciora di Dentro, *West Ridge* of Ago di Sciora, and others.

Klucker wanted the first ascent of the *North Ridge* of the Badile just as bad as anyone at the time, and one day, while waiting for a client to show up, he soloed the lower pitches of it. Unable to get footing in his stiff boots, he climbed in socks. He never wrote how high he got, but the rumor is it was almost halfway up.

On August 4, 1923, another guide, Walter Risch, led his client up the first ascent of the *Nordkante* (aka *North Ridge*). In July 1937, Riccardo Cassin led the first ascent of the northeast face of the Badile, on a route that would eventually bear his name, and a climb that would



French guide Simon Duverney enjoys some of the Sciora hut's alpine amenities.

"People come back, and they tell us how much they enjoy it, that it's not even a big challenge, but they climbed it because it's so long," she says. "It's allowed nowadays, to simply enjoy climbing an easy route."



Barbara Elia climbs the *North Ridge* of the Piz Badile, which some might say is the most classic rock route in Switzerland.





If only every day were such a perfect weather day on Bugeleisen (5.8).

become mountaineering legend. Cassin, with partners Gino Esposito and Vittorio Ratti, started up the then-unclimbed face, to find Mario Molteni and Giuseppe Valsecchi on the same face attempting its first ascent. Molteni and Valsecchi asked to join Cassin's party, and over three days, the team worked its way up. They summited in a thunderstorm, but Molteni and Valsecchi died of exposure and exhaustion on the descent.

Over the next two decades, the summit register of the route started to read like a European climbing hall of fame: Cassin, 1937; Gaston Rebuffat, 1948; Maurice Herzog, 1949; Louis Lachenal and Lionel Terray, 1949; Jean Couzy, 1952; Lino Lacedelli, 1952.

The second-biggest story of the Badile, next to the first ascent of the *Cassin*, is Hermann Buhl's: On a Friday in July 1952, Buhl left Innsbruck on his bicycle on a Friday night, biked from Landeck to the Austria-Switzerland border, slept for four hours from midnight until 4 a.m. Saturday, then biked 100 miles to Promontogno and hiked into the Sciora hut, where he spent the night, hoping to get up at 2 a.m. to start his climb. He overslept, woke at 4 a.m., hiked up, started climbing at 6 a.m., summited at 10:30 a.m., downclimbed the *North Ridge*, got back to his pack at 3 p.m., descended to Promontogno, and got back on his bike. After 90 miles of riding (including a 3,600-foot climb up the Maloja Pass), he fell asleep on his bike and crashed into the River Inn. He walked the rest of the way to a bus stop and took a bus into Landeck at 4:30 a.m. Monday morning.

We walked to the Sasc Fura hut in pouring rain. Two Polish climbers organized their gear outside, on their way down from the *Gaiser-Lehman* route on Piz Cengalo. They said they had one day without rain and that the rainy summer had not just been Switzerland, but all of Europe.

Inside, hut guardian Heidi Altweger told us the top third of the *Nordkante* was covered in ice, and no one had topped out in a week. Altweger left a full-time career in social work at age 50 when she answered a newspaper ad about the Sasc Fura hut guardian job, and she has worked here since 2007. She first climbed the *Nordkante* in 1988, and every summer at the hut, she tries to arrange for at least one day off so she can climb it one more time. Because, she says, it's just a fun climb.

"People come back, and they tell us how much they enjoy it, just this climbing, that it's not even a big challenge, but they did a big thing because it's so long," she says. "I just think to people it's allowed nowadays, that you're allowed to simply enjoy climbing an easy route. The Badile *North Ridge*, when the weather and everything is OK, is one of those routes you really can enjoy."

From the back of the hut, when I walk outside to the bathroom, I can see about half the *Nordkante*. The other half is in a cloud. My chances of climbing this thing, the El Cap of 5.fun, are also in a cloud. The forecast is now a 70% chance of disappointment.



Up until this trip, I had always believed that destination climbing stories have to have the author in them. They must contain, at some point, the standard “No Shit There I Was Moment,” wherein the writer communicates to the reader that the climbing is good here, I have gone and tested it for you, and can vouch for it. This thought was a source of stress as I ate dinner at the Sasc Fura hut and tried to admit to myself that this route, the 3,000 feet I have traveled 5,248 miles to climb, is probably not going to happen.

I woke up at 5 a.m. to go outside and pee, and I saw stars and the hulking shadow of what, even in my blurred, contact lens-less vision, I knew was the *Nordkante*. Back in my bunk, I tossed and turned for an hour or so, wondering if we made the right call. There is ice up top. No one has summited in the past week. Zero other people have come to the Sasc Fura hut to try this route, one of the most famous and accessible climbs in the Alps.

I woke up a couple hours later, and at breakfast, Simon said, “We can still go do it.” Meaning the first 10 or so pitches, or the first half, or whatever. Simon climbs 5.13. He is always stoked. Why was I not as stoked? Should we climb the first half? I don’t think so. That would still mean I’d have to come back and finish it one day.

I asked Simon: “If you could fly to America knowing you could climb the first half of the *Nose*, but not finish the climb, would you do it?”

He paused. “Hm, I don’t know.”

On the walk down from the Sasc Fura hut, I fell behind the group, carefully stepping over wet roots and rocks, unable to get out of my head. The sun popped out, it rained again briefly, and I finally admitted to myself that the story of a place does not have to have me in it. This whole thing, this place, the history and the story of climbing here, it can’t be captured in a selfie. Regardless of whether or not one more American verifies it, the *Nordkante* of the Piz Badile is still one of the greatest rock climbs in the world. I don’t get to say I was there on that amazing ridge, but I can solemnly swear that it is an amazing climb. All I can say is I saw it from the base, and I know I’ll be back to do it someday.

The Sciora Hut sits directly beneath many popular climbing routes.



Hut trips in Switzerland involve more green and less white: Climbers move from the Sciora Hut to the Sasc Fura Hut.



“This whole thing, this place, the history and the story of climbing here, it can’t be captured in a selfie. Regardless of whether or not one more American verifies it, the *Nordkante* of the Piz Badile is still one of the greatest rock climbs in the world.”





The north face of the Matterhorn. The Hornli Ridge runs along the left ridge.

## Climb The Matterhorn

This year marks the 150th anniversary of the iconic peak's first ascent

I didn't expect the summit to look like this. A small dome to rest on, perhaps, or a sharp point to prop a leg upon triumphantly, but not this serrated, wind-assaulted tightrope stretching the distance of a football field. It's wild and intimidating—one errant step, and it'd be a rip-roaring slide. Your partner would have no choice but to jump over the other side of the ridge to arrest your fall. There are two distinct high points: the

Swiss summit at 14,690 feet and the Italian summit at 14,686. It's tempting to tiptoe across, but the 50 mph wind gusts make it difficult to stay upright (and impossible to stay warm), so we ham for a summit selfie, take a quick gulp of now-slushy Coke, and make haste back down the *Hornli Ridge*, the same route the seven-person first ascent team took in 1865.

The Matterhorn was the last of the major peaks of the Alps to be climbed. British climber Edward Whymper made several attempts and was finally successful with the help of a strong father-son Swiss guide duo, both named Peter Taugwalter. The rest

of the team was comprised of Michel Croz (a Chamonix guide) and three more Brits, Reverend Charles Hudson, Lord Francis Douglas, and Douglas Robert Hadow. The latter four fell to their deaths on the descent. It was so controversial that Queen Victoria threatened to ban Brits from attempting any further Matterhorn ascents. Her words only fueled interest in the peak, causing hordes of U.K. visitors to come to Zermatt just to see the deadly mountain. This Matterhorn mania is widely considered the birth of tourism in this once predominantly agrarian valley.

There are roughly 30 routes and major variations to the summit today. Every-

thing that can be climbed has been done in every season, though every route on the ice and snow-encrusted pyramid of crumbling gneiss is a still a serious undertaking. The Hornli Ridge that I ascended with local climber Andreas Steindl (who once ran from town to the summit in 2 hours, 57 minutes, an incredible speed record) isn't difficult, but it's long and sustained with serious rockfall hazards. It gains 4,000 feet from the Hornli Hut, and it's often severely underestimated. It demands great fitness and prior experience. Though Swiss guides haul hundreds of folks to the summit daily in prime conditions, instability and foul weather limited the

summit tally to fewer than 100 climbers in 2014 when I summited.

Zermatt has higher hopes in 2015, with celebrations planned throughout the year, culminating in July with the grand reopening of the renovated Hornli Hut, the now-traditional launching pad for the majority of Matterhorn ascents.

Climbers talk a lot about aesthetics, but I'd argue there isn't a prettier mountain out there, or one that's more alluring to climb. Get a jump on it, and you can run up and be back in the valley enjoying a beer before lunch, satisfied with a major tick off your bucket list. Find out more at [zermatt.ch](http://zermatt.ch). —Shannon Davis



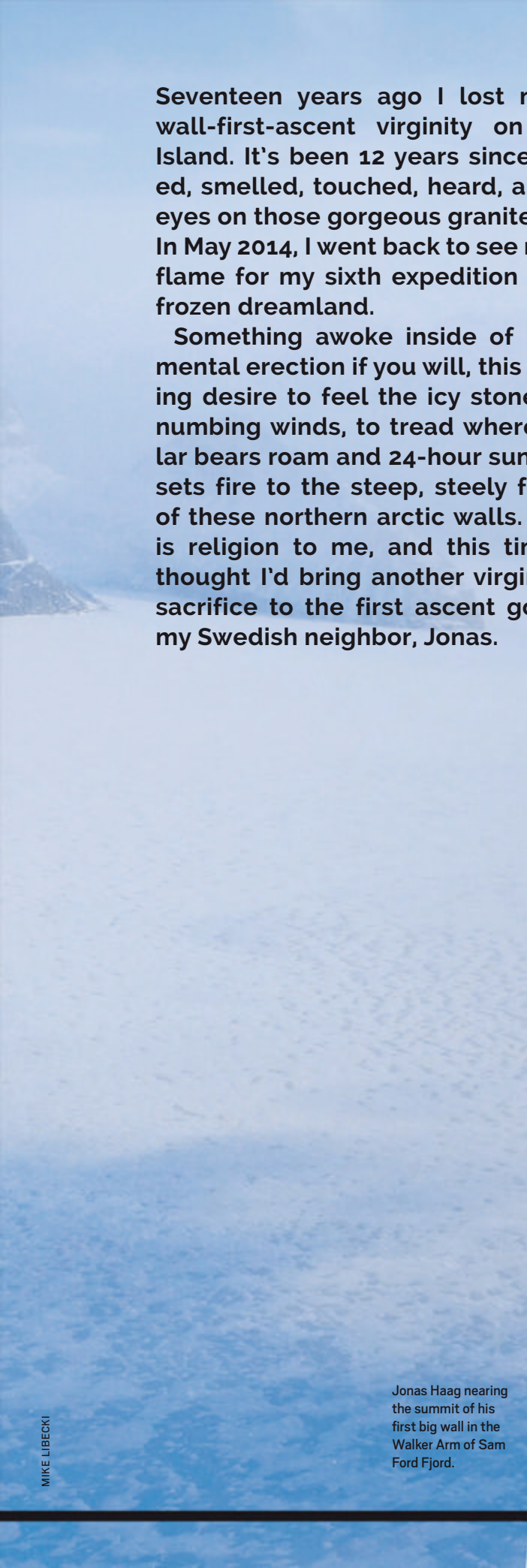
A full-page photograph of a mountain climber in a green jacket and dark gear, ascending a steep, snow-covered rock face. The climber is positioned in the lower-left quadrant, pulling a rope. The background features jagged, snow-capped mountain peaks under a clear blue sky. The title 'The Way of the Turtle' is overlaid in large, bold letters, with 'The Way' and 'Turtle' in yellow and 'of the' in white. Subtitle text is also present in white.

# The Way of the Turtle

A big wall apprenticeship  
on Baffin Island  
with MIKE LIBECKI

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Seventeen years ago I lost my big-wall-first-ascent virginity on Baffin Island. It's been 12 years since I tasted, smelled, touched, heard, and laid eyes on those gorgeous granite walls. In May 2014, I went back to see my old flame for my sixth expedition to the frozen dreamland.

Something awoke inside of me, a mental erection if you will, this burning desire to feel the icy stone and numbing winds, to tread where polar bears roam and 24-hour sunlight sets fire to the steep, steely faces of these northern arctic walls. This is religion to me, and this time I thought I'd bring another virgin to sacrifice to the first ascent gods: my Swedish neighbor, Jonas.

Jonas Haag nearing the summit of his first big wall in the Walker Arm of Sam Ford Fjord.

**WHEN IT COMES TO CLIMBING** big wall first ascents, my approach has always been quite simple: Slow is fast. For as long as I can remember, slow is fast has been an organic way of life for me, from math competitions in my youth to climbing around the world at my ripened age of 41. Laugh if you will—I'm as aware as you are that going slow doesn't make a good headline—but it's proven its worth time and time again to me, whether it's a nonstop push to a summit or a couple weeks of capsule-style portaledge luxury on the side of a wall. Slow is fast as a mantra is about embracing consistency and constancy: flowing, moving, working, breathing, all while immersed in the magical moment of now. And then, almost out of nowhere, I find myself standing on the summit doing my ritual celebrations: eating a victory salsami and dancing while wearing the current year's Chinese zodiac animal mask.

The slow-is-fast approach is not only a physical thing, but a mental grasp at patience, which is necessary for increasing your chances of success (or simply avoiding death). But honestly, I am never, ever in a hurry. Allowing enough time to enjoy daily rituals high on a wall is part of why I am there in the first place. For example, I love making hot coffee and watching the sunrise on a small rock ledge just big enough for my ass cheeks, feet dangling in the air thousands of feet up. There is nothing like waiting out a ferocious storm inside a portaledge for several days, reading good books, meditating on the now, and embracing the intense high. What's that old saying? "The higher we get, the higher we get." It's true, isn't it? Sure, I've climbed several routes in a continuous push, body trashed, exhausted, and proud of the accomplishment. Sometimes that is just what the route equation commands. But, it's not nearly as enjoyable, at least for me, as just setting my cruise control to slow-is-fast and enjoying the view of the ultra-now. Cumulatively, I've been on the side of a rock wall for more than a year of my life. It could've been much less, but that'd be a tragedy. I am like a turtle in a world of rabbit climbers. But remember, in the classic story, somehow the turtle ends up getting to the finish line first, or in my case, getting to climb a lot of first ascents.

Speaking of rabbits, how about a joke? What did the boy rabbit say to the girl rabbit? "This won't take long...Did it?!"

Now, do you think either rabbit found that enjoyable? I like the turtle approach better; this slow-is-fast terminology pertains to my lifestyle as a whole, a constant wheel in motion to find and climb more first ascents. If I could accumulate another year's worth of nights spent on the side of walls before I die, it would be just fine by me. Thus, my love affair with Baffin Island.

In the climbing world, Baffin is known as the home to the world's largest concentration of the biggest and steepest walls. It was in 1997 when I first stepped through this granite kingdom's doorway and climbed *The Weeping Wall* in the Weasel Valley, not far from Mt. Thor and Mt. Asgaard, with two Japanese partners I had met in Yosemite, Misako Koyanagi and Shinichi Sakamoto. For five summers prior, Yosemite had been my home and training ground for arctic vertical exploration. In 1998, I went back to Baffin, to Sam Ford Fjord with Josh Helling and Russell Mitrovich for the first ascent of the north face of the Walker Citadel, which took 30 frozen days living on the wall to reach the summit. In 1999, I climbed my first solo first ascent big wall, the Ship's Prow at the mouth of the Scott Inlet. In 2000, Josh, Russ, John Middendorf, and I bagged the first ascent of the Fin in Sam Ford Fjord, which was made into a film for Outdoor Life Network. Then in 2001, I spent a month in Sam Ford Fjord guiding the Red Bull BASE jumpers Shane McConkey, Felix Baumgartner, Miles Daisher, and crew. The love affair with Baffin went on for five years in a row. Then I decided to start seeing other walls on other continents, but I never stopped thinking about Baffin.

Baffin Island had taken my first-ascent-big-wall virginity; those walls would be in my heart forever. Do you want to go deeper into the truth of the matter? Well, here you go then: I've had five wet dreams in my entire life, and they all happened on Baffin. One every year for five years in a row. I suppose that might



be too much information, but I am writing about Baffin Island and my experiences there, and this is a climbing publication, so aren't I suppose to share the most intimate moments?

**MAY 2014.** It was time to head back alone and look for new cracks that led to an unclimbed summit. First, I contacted my friend Levi Palituq. He's a local Inuit and a friend that has helped on past expeditions. He lives in Clyde River, a small settlement on the east coast of Baffin. For the eastern fjords of Baffin, the usual route is to fly into Clyde River, then it's either sleds pulled by snowmobiles or dog teams over the frozen ocean to access the walls. This is in April, May, and some of June when the ocean is ice and hypothermia is lurking. I cringed when I reserved my plane tickets; they were the most expensive commercial airline tickets I had ever bought. From Salt Lake City to Ottawa to Iqaluit to Clyde River, it was \$4,200! I have flown around the world for less. The airlines up there make it simple: Pay through the roof or don't go. Thank goodness for credit cards and the convenience of debt to live your dreams in 'merica.

Two weeks before leaving, I got a random call from a good friend, Jonas Haag, a transplant from Sweden. He lives near my home in Cottonwood Heights, Utah. It was a sunny Sunday afternoon on April 20 at 4:20. I remember because this specific date and time is a relatable and notable moment of the year for many climbers. Through my crackly, old-school home phone (I have never owned a cell phone), Jonas said in his Swedish accent, "Hey Mike, what's up, brother? Do you want to go for a hike with the dogs?"

"Dude! Yes!" I said, and we made plans to head to The Fairy Fortress, a wilderness area a few miles up Deaf Smith Canyon in the Wasatch Mountains near our homes. It's one of the last dog-friendly hiking and climbing areas around. We headed into the forest with four dogs anxiously lead-

ing the way; no doubt they find the same joy hiking in the mountains that we find climbing. As we hiked, our discussion intensified about life and our goals ahead, and I said to Jonas, "Man, I am so fired up. I leave in two weeks to Baffin Island. Utter solo mystery awaits!" Jonas told me it was a fantasy of his to go there someday, to climb a wall or BASE jump. Jonas had never climbed a big wall, though he had some cragging experience.

Surrounded by a singing stream, alpine flowers, and rock cliffs, I had a spontaneous, wonderful idea: "If you want to learn about big wall climbing, there is one really fast, really intense way to do it. Just come with me!" Jonas is an extraordinary human, so I was not surprised when his eyes lit up, and a huge smile spread across his beard-speckled cheeks. "Seriously? Do I have what it takes?" he rightly asked.

"You could do a big wall apprenticeship. I can show you everything I know," I said. "I have been fortunate to learn so much from so many amazing partners the last 20 years; it would be sweet to share this with you. Do you know a clove hitch?"

Jonas said, "Yeah man, I know a clove hitch." And we ran down the mountain trying to keep up with our dogs.

**JONAS HAD BEEN FREE CLIMBING** at crags for a few years and knew his way around gear and proper safety techniques, and he was always fired up. He had also been up Denali, as well as Cotopaxi and Antisana in Ecuador, so he knew something about enjoying expedition life and frozen temps, too. When joy is the most common thing between people, there is no doubt that the sweetness of life is waiting. Jonas called me the next day, "Mike, I got the time off! I am in!"

It took me years of training in Yosemite to be ready for Baffin Island. And I had the opportunity to learn from some incredible partners there. I feel fortunate that so much knowledge was passed on to me, like I had been a big wall apprentice myself. Now I had a



First-time big waller Jonas Haag enjoys the luxury of capsule-style climbing.



chance to share this knowledge. It was also a welcome personal nod, an acceptance into a later point of my life. After all, the first big wall I climbed in Baffin was 17 years ago. Though I must say, I feel stronger and more psyched than I ever have.

So it began: The Way of the Turtle and the Art of Slow is Fast. As with many a great expedition, ours started at Costco for beef jerky, oatmeal, nuts, M&M's, coffee, and chocolate-covered almonds. We double-bagged everything, including our dehydrated dinners: pad thai, lasagna, and beef stew, among many savory selections. Then we loaded up tons of Clif bars. It's important to eat well when you're living in temperatures colder than your freezer at home.

Then came the rack: 2.5 sets of medium cams, one each of a No. 5 and 6, three sets of small cams, two sets of nuts, three sets of blades and arrows, lots of peckers, a variety of hooks, bunches of biners, slews of slings, cordelettes, bolt kit, tag line, ropes, portaledge with expedition fly, rock shoes with sewn-on gaiters, approach shoes, a helmet, my old-school knee pads, a harness that will fit over a few layers, jugs, aiders, daisies, MSR Reactor stove with hanging kit, the works. The plan was for "capsule-style" climbing, to be prepared to live on a wall for a couple weeks if we had to wait out storms.

The rest of the gear list is easy, and after packing for more than 50 expeditions now, it's written on the front walls of my brain. A very warm sleeping bag, down is fine since everything is frozen. I don't even wear a hard shell, just a softshell when climbing, which is perfect for the light arctic snow glistening like diamonds in the 24-hour magical golden light (sorry, lost myself in a bit of a daydream there). A couple pads for sleeping on the frozen-ocean basecamp, just one for the wall. An XGK stove for basecamp, good for melting a lot of snow and ice. A sleep tent and a cook tent, first aid kit, and repair kit. Books,

iPod, and other life-enhancing necessities. Lots of layers and hats and gloves and a down jacket, a balaclava, and ski goggles (hard to climb when your eyes and the skin on your face are literally frozen). Oh, and can't forget a rifle in case a polar bear shows up and has not eaten a seal in a while. And then you're off!

We got held up in the Ottawa airport because we arrived with a rifle. It took about three hours of questioning until 3 a.m. before they let us through, even though I had all the right paperwork. We grabbed a bunch of donuts from Tim Hortons and crashed for two hours before our flight to Iqaluit, then on to Clyde River. My friend Levi picked us up and took us to the only hotel in town. We repacked our bags from airplane mode to sea ice basecamp mode. Local Inuit showed up and offered to sell us bone, antler, and ivory carvings. We also had a couple people offer to sell us marijuana. It's one of the most common things among all the places I have been around the world. There is always marijuana offered, on every continent. Just legalize it already! Jeez.

The next morning Jonas and I and all of our gear were on two *qamutiqs*, traditional Inuit sleds that have two long, 15-foot, ski-like bases that bend and flex with the wavy, sometimes rough ice beneath. Snowmobiles pulled us over the frozen ocean, and six hours later we entered Sam Ford Fjord, home to dozens of steep granite walls and towers bigger than skyscrapers; they welcomed us with ominous, surreal beauty. Being here always makes me feel like there is a God, and he must have been a climber. Our two Inuit snowmobile drivers, Levi and Maurice, stopped to show us the first of many polar bear tracks we would see that day. I had never seen so many polar bear tracks in Sam Ford Fjord before. Levi said in accented English, "Bears have been more active here than I have seen before. Lots of seals here." He pointed, and we could see two seals by a hole in the ice. The polar bear tracks in front of us revealed there were two big males, a mother, and two cubs in the area. I could see a bit of concern in Jonas' eyes now that we were among the walls.

Our goal was to find a beautiful line of cracks that started from the frozen ocean and ended at a summit in Sam Ford Fjord. It was not necessarily about the formation, as it sometimes can be. We were going to reconnoiter as many walls as we could within about eight hours, the time allotted on the *qamutiqs*. Two of the lines we scoped were just too big and demanding for the time we had, as well as the experience of our team. The routes we passed up were 5,000+ feet of climbing; I have plans to return to them with my buddy Cheyne Lempe for his first Baffin trip this year. These giant routes were both unclimbed, and possibly the biggest unclimbed walls on Baffin Island. I was thinking of something in the 2,000- to 3,000-foot range for Jonas and me, still big and demanding but more feasible considering the time and the apprenticeship. After cruising Sam Ford Fjord and the connecting Walker Arm, we finally found our destination. It was a tower I remembered from 1998 when Josh Helling, Russell Mitrovich, and I climbed *The Mahayana Wall* on the Walker Citadel. According to the map, the snowcap behind and above this tower was 3,500 feet in elevation. So it was probably about 3,000 feet of climbing. Jonas pointed out some incredible splitters on one of the routes that could not be denied. This would be our route!

The line coincided well with some of our climbing goals. The first was not to drill on lead, using only natural cracks and features. The second was not to use a hammer or any type of piton on lead, to climb clean. Since we planned to climb capsule-style with a portaledge and take enough supplies for two weeks to wait out any storms, I planned on drilling bolts at anchors if necessary, which would double as rappel anchors on the way down. As we sipped tea and stared up at the tower, it was about -5°F without wind chill, so rock shoes and barehanded climbing did not seem so fun. Inevitable cold and suffering awaited.

Just before Levi and Maurice left, Maurice stretched his arm, pointed out over the frozen sea, and said in his slow, deep accent, "Hey, it looks like we have some company. Can you see him? Looks like a pretty big male." They unhitched the *qamutiqs*. Levi said, "Come on, let's go and meet him." A few

Always a threat on Baffin, a curious polar bear can end any expedition.





minutes later we were running down the bear on our snowmobiles; you could see terror in his eyes. We literally scared the shit out of him as he was running, but that was the point, to scare him away from our basecamp in hopes he would not come back.

We set up our sleep tent and our cook tent and made cozy beds on the frozen ocean. Hopefully, if a bear did come, he would find his way into the cook tent first. The following day we studied our line on the tower's southeast buttress. Almost half of the route was comprised of thin, splitter cracks up golden granite and the rest was red granite corners, with some mottled sections of mayhem up black-and-white, narwhal skin-colored rock. I could see a few sections of hanging teeth and daggers; I would deal with those when the time came.

There are a couple crutches that make it simpler to climb on Baffin compared to some other places around the world. First is the 24-hour sunlight. You can climb as long as you want without worrying about a headlamp. Another is the approach to the walls. Pretty much everywhere else in the world, the approach to remote, unclimbed walls is half the battle. On Baffin, in the eastern fjords, the rock mostly comes right out of the ocean, and you can easily arrive right at the base. Of course, low elevation is another factor. There is lots and lots of oxygen available when you climb right off the ocean.

After a frosty night, we woke up and had a mellow morning of coffee and pancakes while Bob Marley rocked "Natty Dread" on our solar-powered speakers, then Grateful Dead live in 1977 at Barton Hall, then some Snoop Lion. The view across the fjord was of some of the most impressive granite monoliths on the planet: the Polar Sun Spire, Beluga Spire, and the Walker Citadel. We packed our haulbags, dragged them over the sea ice to the base of the wall, and started climbing. I said, "I am just going to plan on leading all the pitches; if you get psyched and want to lead a pitch, just let me know." Jonas said, "Yeah man, I am psyched to do whatever it takes. I am going to work on my jumaring and cleaning skills and see what this is all about and how I feel." We climbed and fixed three pitches. Jonas juggled and cleaned for the first time. The first two pitches were easy 5.6 and 60 meters long. The third started up the steep part of the wall, some tricky A2 shenanigans through some loose flakes, then a perfect  $\frac{1}{2}$ " A1 crack for another 60-meter pitch. We decided to haul up our gear to a big ledge the following day. We headed back to our sea ice camp and gazed in awe at the spectacular moon as it traversed across the sky. That's the thing about Baffin: The walls are only a fraction of my never-ending love affair. I can honestly say after many expeditions to remote areas around the world, Baffin is still my favorite place.

The usual clockwork of frozen big wall climbing began. Big wall climbing in subzero temperatures can feel like some kind of engineering job. When we woke up, we clocked in, and when we got in our sleeping bags, we clocked out. I led the pitches with a tag line, pulled up the haul line and then hauled our bags. Jonas juggled and cleaned the pitches and dealt with lowering the bags. It reminded me of when I lived in Yosemite 20 years ago; I had a friend that followed me up a dozen big aid routes on El Cap—he just wanted to jug and clean. I led every pitch, and we had our systems dialed.

The climbing started to get really sweet on the fourth pitch—just over vertical into a straight-in thin crack, from  $\frac{1}{4}$ " to 1", that split gold granite in two. If it weren't so cold, it probably would have been 5.11 or 5.12 climbing. The next pitch started with a few frozen 5.10 face moves and brought me into another A1 splitter. It was extra cold because of the wind chill; ropes were flying around like big whips. They cracked at me to keep moving as I shivered and shook out my hands below me to get blood back into my fingers. It's the belayer that really suffers in the cold, though. On lead it stays warmer because you're moving and working. Jonas was starting to get the full value of arctic big wall climbing. Sometimes laughing and mocking the suffering temperature is the key to getting through it. I was literally laughing on lead at how amazing it felt to be on a first ascent with cracks of this caliber. These are the kind of cracks that a climber would sell his soul for. We followed this system for two pitches. So far, every pitch was a full 60-meter stretcher. Sure, I could have stopped at better stances here and there,

but my theory is always the longest pitch possible every time, hanging belays or not. Jonas radioed from below, "Mike, fiiiive feet!" Through the wind I could barely hear him from the radio that hung on my harness. One of the things we had talked about was letting me know when I was almost out of rope.

Almost out of rope! I remember that moment—super stoked to have another stretcher pitch and moving up slowly but surely—I heard Jonas on the radio again, "Yeah brother, loving this, yee-haw!" He too figured out to mock the cold. But then, and this always seems to be the case on big climbs, "When life looks like easy street, there is danger at your door." I moved closer to a small stance, perfectly placed at the end of a 60-meter pitch. Jonas yelled through the radio, "No. More. Rope!" At the same moment, I went to pull an undercling so I could reach another crack far to my right and place a cam to start building an anchor, then CRRRACCKK! The big flake I was underclinging came off. I was at a small stance with a cam to my left when the flake slammed down onto me, and I was whipped onto the cam, left hanging from my daisy chain. The flake stopped. It had three points of contact: my left shoulder and arm, a cam with my daisy below, and the right part of the wall. The flake was about 5' x 3.5' and six to eight inches thick, weighing well over 200 pounds. It was hyper madness all at once in my head: "I-could-die-but-I-am-not-dead, It's-going-to-chop-my-rope, I-am-fucked, I-have-to-send-this-flake, Fuck-it's-going-to-chop-my-rope..." I could feel blood running down my arm under my jacket. The flake had ripped through to flesh instantly. It literally took everything I had to lift the flake, move it out of the way, and drop it below me. Somehow, basically pure luck, it did not hit the ropes below me. If my lead and tag lines were chopped, I would have been stranded 60 meters away from Jonas, at least if I were still connected with my daisy chain. It did slice the sling connected to the cam in two like it was dental floss. I was not worried about the flake hitting Jonas because I had traversed a decent way right from the anchor below. The flake sounded like a slow-motion helicopter at first, spinning faster and faster until it exploded against the wall like a bomb, with shrapnel flying in all directions. The flake had been frozen to the wall. It's just part of the deal when doing a first ascent, or any climb really. I was looking forward to clocking out that day. My arm was bleeding in two places. The rope had some good furry spots, but all was okay. Soon the haulbag was up at the anchor, and Jonas arrived on his jugs.

Two feet from the anchor, the rock changed from golden granite to a blackish-gray band of deteriorating stone. I had seen this section from the ground—narwhal skin. I was on high alert from the huge flake that almost ruined everything. I started leading and was immediately under a huge refrigerator-sized pillar of stone that was frozen or somehow connected to the wall; all evidence showed it was detached. I ran out some easy face climbing to the right and into a big offwidth-squeeze funk show and delicately made my way around the refrigerator. I placed gear with calculated runners that acted as tensioned directionals so the rope snaked perfectly around a maze of big, loose flakes and teeth without touching them. Then an overhanging aid section of kitty litter rock. It was the scariest pitch so far, and got







Jonas learning as he goes on pitch five; he had never used jumars before this trip.

a C3 R/X rating. I pulled up on a big ledge, our soon-to-be bivy. There was a bunch of snow there, another calculation from the ground and a crutch for climbing arctic walls: lots of snow and ice to melt saves weight from hauling water up.

We sat out a storm day in the portaledge before moving our camp up. These are always welcome rest days: cooking hot meals with the hanging stove, reading a good book, meditating, and then being snapped back into reality as snow and wind turned our portaledge's rainfly into King Kong's hyperventilating lungs. The storm broke the next day, and we started packing everything into haulbags. It's a tedious task with so much equipment. We had fixed four long pitches above and prepared to haul to our high point. I showed Jonas a Munter-mule knot system that is ideal for weighting and unweighting the bags with ease. At the top of pitch six, we were on the big, snowy ledge. One of the great joys of a natural ledge is how much easier it makes taking a dump; it's much nicer than hanging in your harness.

Another windstorm hit us the day after we hauled to our new camp. At moments we were in a wind-powered washing machine on the heavy-duty cycle; our entire portaledge was blown up and down and into the wall. SLAM! SLAM! SLAM! Every time I began to worry that our portaledge would be ripped apart, the gusts mellowed. Our portaledge was made to take a beating and proved itself once again. Though, admittedly, I was scared of rockfall. With 60 mph gusts, wind can easily pull big flakes off the wall above. Many rocks came down around us but nothing too big. When they hit the wall it sounded like a rifle firing at us. Pih-hhkw! Fortunately, we were only hit by shrapnel that ricocheted off the thick rainfly. It sounded like hail pattering on the fly when kitty litter, sand, snow, and ice were scooped up by the wind from somewhere above. We ate beef jerky and chocolate-covered almonds as our muscles got a chance to catch up on some protein. Then, Jonas surprised me, laughing, he said, "Hey Mike, check this out! Now we will make the top no problem!" He had brought his book *How to Climb Big Walls*, by Chris McNamara. I said, "Dude! No way, that is awesome. Classic, man!" It was a good laugh. I took a bunch of fun photos of him reading the how-to book already 1,200 feet up the wall. Although very informative, I had never read this book myself. Funny though, as I started flipping

through it, I noticed I do things much differently than what the book advises. I am a left-handed Polish dude by blood, so that probably explains it. I have my old-school ways, and they work for me. Seems like I have always done things just a little different than others.

Vast blue skies greeted us the following morning. We clocked in and scooped out snow from the SealLine bags into the pot on the hanging stove and boiled water for oatmeal and coffee. We were never in a hurry. It usually took about 45 minutes to get everything ready, cook, put on our boots, take a dump, and get into belay and lead mode. As I led the pitch, I was horrified by what could have happened: Loose flakes the size of guillotine blades somehow clung to the wall. I was perplexed that the wind did not pull them off and send them down to decapitate us during the ferocious windstorm the previous day. The pitch was mellow, 5.9 with some easy aid. To avoid the loose rock, I placed directional slings so the rope wouldn't knock off the flakes and kill Jonas below. I radioed to Jonas, "Yo! When you come up, be very careful. There is loose rock everywhere!" Jonas juggled and cleaned faster with each pitch. I suggested he re-rack as he cleaned to be more efficient, then I could rack up quicker while he could stack the rope. The next pitch started off with big stemming moves through expanding flakes of white granite that crunched like potato chips. Protection was minimal, maybe only good enough for mental assurance. This is where I almost whipped when a huge flake fell away under the weight of my right foot. Soon I was in a big corner that opened up to a giant six-foot-wide overhanging hallway with double cracks in the back of it. The entire system was hollow and scared the fuck out of me. I kept



tapping and slapping the giant flakes; if any of them moved, I would have either died or decided to bail, but they remained still. There were several 20- to 30-foot giant pieces of stone sandwiched between millions of tons of granite. Mostly scary A2 ended with a mandatory 5.11 stemming section to finish another 60-meter stretcher. I drilled two bolts for an anchor and hauled our lead bag while Jonas juggled and cleaned. With two pitches fixed, we rapped back to the portaledge. On the way down, I threw off a few dozen flakes so we did not have to worry about them above us while we slept. We cooked a warm dinner of fettuccine alfredo and hot chocolate and talked about women.

**IT WAS GETTING COLDER.** Levi had joked that there was no evidence of global warming on Baffin. We juggled up two fixed pitches and continued our turtle's pace reach for the summit. I had been looking forward to the next red corner pitch since gazing at it from the frozen ocean below with binoculars. It started about 60 feet above our anchor. Once I pulled through an overhanging section of crumbly quartz, more potato chip flakes, then a quick grunt through an offwidth, the red corner delivered the goods: steep 5.9 hands and stemming for more than 100 feet in a red, brick-and-mortar corner. The variety of the pitches so far was splendid. I drilled two bolts for the anchor. We were going to rap the route, so getting in rap anchors as we went made sense. Soon I had another 60-meter pitch done: 20 feet to finish out the sweet red corner, some chossy, blocky mayhem, another 30-foot corner, then a traverse through big tooth-like flakes, finally to a big bombay squeeze with a good ledge for an anchor.

We had been on the wall for about eight days. We were up 10 pitches from the ocean. At this point we planned to blast off to the summit in a push. Unfortunately, the next pitch was incredibly loose and frightening. I had already almost died from the big flake that came off below, so I was being cautious, almost paranoid about loose rock, and rightfully so. There was a lot of ice gardening in the cracks to find true protection. It was a subzero day, and it took us a few hours to safely lead the next 60-meter pitch, drill an anchor, haul, and clean it. We fixed it and rapped down to the portaledge. We decided the next day we would push for the summit. At this point I estimated we had about four to five roped pitches to go before the steep hike to the top. We were delayed by another day of fierce winds and protein intake.

Push for the summit day! The clockwork of coffee, oatmeal, dump, gear up, and jug. This time, though, we were unsure when we would get back to the portaledge. We had to jug up five pitches to our high point (yes, we brought five ropes, two lead lines, and three static lines for fixing and hauling). I usually keep a rope at the portaledge in case of an emergency, but we needed to fix it unexpectedly.

Once at our high point—we brought two of the fixed lines with us to continue our push—it was go time. It was the coldest day since we had been in Baffin. The wind started to kick up, and clouds were moving in. Snow started to blow sideways. My toes and fingers were numb before I started leading. This was a tricky pitch. Steep to an overhanging bulge through loose blocks, eventually to a perfect, thin  $\frac{1}{2}$ " to 1" splitter for 100 feet. Slow is fast, yes, but I wanted to increase the slowness to a little more fastness at this point. I radioed to Jonas, "Hey man, let's step it up a notch, just clean and jug as fast as you can!" I made a natural anchor, no bolts at this one. He cleaned and was at the anchor in half the time than before. That's when the storm really hit us hard. Snow was blowing up the wall. We were both plastered by snow and slowly turning white. Of course, this is when the goggles come in handy, as with every other piece of cold-weather artillery. Everything was literally freezing. The rope was like a metal cable, and slings were like popsicles—when you held one by the end it stayed erect. Cam hinges were sticking. Jonas barely got the rope to work in the Grigri it was so frozen. Some of my small cams would not work, so I put them in my mouth without touching flesh to metal and exhaled to unfreeze them. It worked. Had they touched my flesh, they would have stuck to me like in that classic scene from "A Christmas Story," when the boy gets his tongue stuck to the metal flagpole. Snow, wind, cold—I started to get concerned. I was so cold I had to consider if we should go on or if we should think about going back down to the portaledge. It was now or never. I was 100 feet up perfect A1 cracks cut into golden granite when I radioed down to Jonas, "Jonaaaassss! You OK down there?!" He responded, "Yeaah, man! I am freezing but loving it, trying to take a pee!" There were many moments that Jonas inspired me, and this was one of them. He must have been fucking frozen! It was -20°F at least! We were suffering, but in the hyper-moment of now! A bit of spicy aid shenanigans and I was at the end of another 60-meter pitch. My jacket, pants, harness, slings, rope—everything was frozen. I live for these moments: pushing the edges of my personal potential. If the storm continued, hypothermia could set in. We had no bivy gear and were seven pitches above our portaledge camp, with who knows how many to go. I placed a

bolt next to the ice-filled shallow seam that took a questionable nut and two small cams. I radioed down to Jonas as I shivered in the snow and wind, "Line is fixed! Belay is off!" A full-on snowstorm was having its way with us. This time, though, it took Jonas longer than I expected to jug and clean. He finally got to the anchor and said, "Fucking hell, man, the jugs were slipping down the frozen rope! I had to keep stopping to massage the rope with the jumar teeth. That was pretty cool actually, made me feel alive. I backed up with the Grigri and tied figure eights." We were on the edge of the unknown, the kind of unknown that could be very painful, or worse.

I started leading up shallow, ice-filled cracks. All of the rock and all of the cracks were glazed with ice. It took time to clean out the crack and then meticulously find a placement. I had an assortment of pitons with me, but so far the route had been hammerless, except for anchor bolts. I wanted to keep it that way. Though, I will admit, after testing some of the pieces that kept popping out because of the ice, I almost had Jonas send up some pins on the tag line. I stayed focused, patient, and was able to get some gear to stick. A lot of the pieces I was aiding on felt like Russian roulette. Even though I have learned to bounce-test tricky aid when possible, some of these pieces were totally on ice. The pitch eased back to a lower angle about 100 feet up, and big cracks ate all of my big cams to the end of another 60-meter pitch. The storm melted, and light snow fell; the clouds that engulfed us started to open up, and we were almost to the end of the roped pitches, where we could hike. Jonas made good time; he was so cold he tried to go faster to get blood flowing and avoid frostbite.

I traversed out on a big ramp to the right about 75 feet to a big snow ledge. I belayed Jonas over; we were pretty sure it would be fifth class from here. Once again, when life looks like easy street, well, there is face climbing of ice-glazed danger at your door. We had to keep pitching out the low-angle rock near the top. It was steep enough that if we fell we would tumble over the edge to our deaths. Had it not been for the ice-covered rock, we would have been able to simul-climb, or maybe even scramble up. Two long, easy ice and snow pitches later, we were able to hike in deep snow to the summit. Sometimes the snow was up to our waists! Our legs and feet froze.

And then, we found ourselves on the top. I was pretty exhausted; it had been a long day already, probably about 30 hours to reach the summit on our final push.

We hugged and double high-fived. Time for the summit salami. I cut it in half, and we indulged on salty calories. The Year of the



Horse masks came out next. I always celebrate the current Chinese lunar year with the appropriate animal mask on the summit. We were stoked to say the least, for about 20 minutes. Then the reality of rapping the route set in.

I got to lead every pitch and haul the bags. Jonas learned to jug and clean, which is no easy task—along with the hundreds of variables that go along with a huge first ascent on a subzero arctic summit. I was blown away by Jonas' work ethic, psych, and commitment. But it wasn't over yet. The summit, as we all know, is just halfway.

We scrambled down to our portaledge, 17 pitches from the ocean. We brought up a haulbag with all the extra gear, tag line, first aid kit, food, and water. I explained to Jonas that one of us would have to "ride the pig." Basically setting up the haulbag to a rappel device, clipping it to a climber's harness, and then riding it down. It seems a little scary when it's your first time. Jonas said later, "I thought, well, if Mike tells me I need to do it, that makes sense because it was part of the learning for this kind of big wall climbing. I needed to understand the system and commit to it." Jonas muscled the bag. I went down first to set up the rap anchors and clipped the remaining ropes to me. One of the ropes got stuck, and we had to cut it. I left slings and biners for bomber rappel anchors, including several nuts and a few cams at the natural anchors. I did not have any more bolts for anchors. When we arrived back at the portaledge, we had been gone 35 hours.

We slept for a long time.

**WE WERE STILL** at our portaledge camp six pitches up, and there was one last thing I wanted to show Jonas. Instead of riding the pigs, we would lower the haulbags all at once. With all of our gear, sleeping bags, portaledge, etc., the weight adds up quick. I tied all the haulbags together into one power-point. I went down first on our two rappel lines, with another line connected

to me and the bags. Once at the anchor below, Jonas started lowering the bags on another rope from the Munter-mule knot. Four ropes in play: two for rappel, two for lowering the bags. Once the bags neared the anchor, I pulled them close with the first lower line and Munter-muled them. This line would become the next lower line. The two lowering lines would alternate, using Munter-mules and making things simple as pie. A few hours later, we stood on the frozen ocean—the true summit.

Jonas crushed his first big wall in amazing style. There was never one moment of anything but positive vibes. On the ground we slept with a loaded rifle, hoping for the best. On our way out, we learned a bear had ambushed two Inuit hunters north of us and they'd barely survived. One hunter had been dragged out of the tent with his head in the polar bear's jaws.

This trip was just training for the next trip. And it will never end.

*Mike Libeck is one of the world's leading expedition climbers and a frequent contributor to Climbing magazine.*



The frozen ocean provides a pleasantly flat and easy approach.





Quick! Name the state you think has the best bouldering in the country. You may have an instant answer, or you may be experiencing some internal strife. Regardless, I'll wager you have California, Tennessee, Utah, or whatever state is currently claiming Hueco Tanks on the tip of your tongue. Maybe even Washington or Colorado. Or Georgia or Alabama. It would be hard to argue against any of those pebble-wrestling heavens, yet that is exactly what I intend to do. In fact, I contend, dear bouldering geeks, that the state with the best bouldering in the whole US of A—hands down—is none other than that large swath of trees, rocks, and Yuengling between New York and Maryland, otherwise known as Pennsylvania. Some call it Rocksylvania. That's right, the Keystone State, a mere afterthought in any rock climbing conversation since the advent of the activity, deserves a place atop your bouldering bucket list, and here's why.



# VARIETY

The diversity of rock types found here is amazing, and it's impossible to mention this array without first touching on the band of Triassic diabase that runs across the southeast corner of the state from Gettysburg all the way to Philly, gracing notable areas like Mount Gretna, Governor Stable, and Haycock Mountain. Southeast Pennsylvania and South Africa are the only places in the world with this type of rock. It demands a technical style to say the least; feet can be nonexistent, and some of the cruxes could be best described as circus tricks. It's addictive, and any Quaker State local will talk your ear off about diabase. But if that's not your thing, we have Deep South-style sandstone at a newly developed area called Coll's Cove, near Ohiopyle in the southwest corner of the state. It rivals Rocktown and Stone Fort for quality.

There are cube-shaped, house-sized blocks on grit sandstone in the north and central parts of the state, at areas like Elk that offer a different style of climbing in a remote setting on almost-too-blank rock. There's the Gunks-like rock in the northeast at Mocanaqua and Francis Walter Dam. We have crimpy, water-polished schist in the Susquehanna River Valley, cobble conglomerate akin to Maple Canyon, and sharp quartz conglomerate that hurts so good to climb on.

It's all here, and it's all amazing. And there's so much of it!

Welcome to Wyom—err, Pennsylvania. Kyle Stapp tests his wide-crack skills on *Astroboy* (V5) at Governor Dick Park, Mount Gretna.



## QUANTITY

Case study: Within an hour's drive of the capital city of Harrisburg, there are no fewer than six separate climbing areas, each with its own distinct character. One area may have as few as 20 developed problems, others as many as 300, all of high quality and only a microcosm of what the entire state has to offer. And the number of areas continues to grow. Every time I go to the gym I hear a new story about how someone uncovered a cluster on a previously unexplored tract of land in the northern part of the state, which leads me to...

Adam Hartman is spotted by wife Missy on *Scarlet Lady* (V4), Governor Dick Park.

## Development

This state is a first ascensionist's dream: First ascents are everywhere if you want them. Even some of the more developed areas have opportunities for undone variations and the occasional unseen boulder. And when you get into the newly found blocks and undiscovered boulderfields (trust me, they're out there), the opportunity to establish five-star lines of all grades is abundant. However, for much of the goods, you have to be willing to go on a bit of an...



# Adventure



To me, this is PA bouldering's trump card. With an ever-growing national climbing community that's constantly sharing beta via online route databases, guidebooks, climbing magazines (ahem), and a host of other tools at our fingertips, finding rocks to climb is easier than ever, particularly at the larger, more established areas. This is an amazing benefit to climbers, but on the other side of that coin, the potential for any sort of real adventure is dwindling. There's so much unexplored wilderness in PA (in terms of climbing) that you can look at satellite images of a rock band, figure out how to get there, and then likely find a constellation of untouched stone. Of course, that image won't guarantee those rocks are climbable, or even reachable for that matter. The woods in the more wild parts of the state are incredibly dense with vast regions containing no trails, no cell service, and virtually inaccessible patches of backcountry. That's real adventure, and it's alive and well here. Sometimes you're blown away by what you discover, and sometimes you put in all that effort for nothing, but that doesn't mean we don't also have...

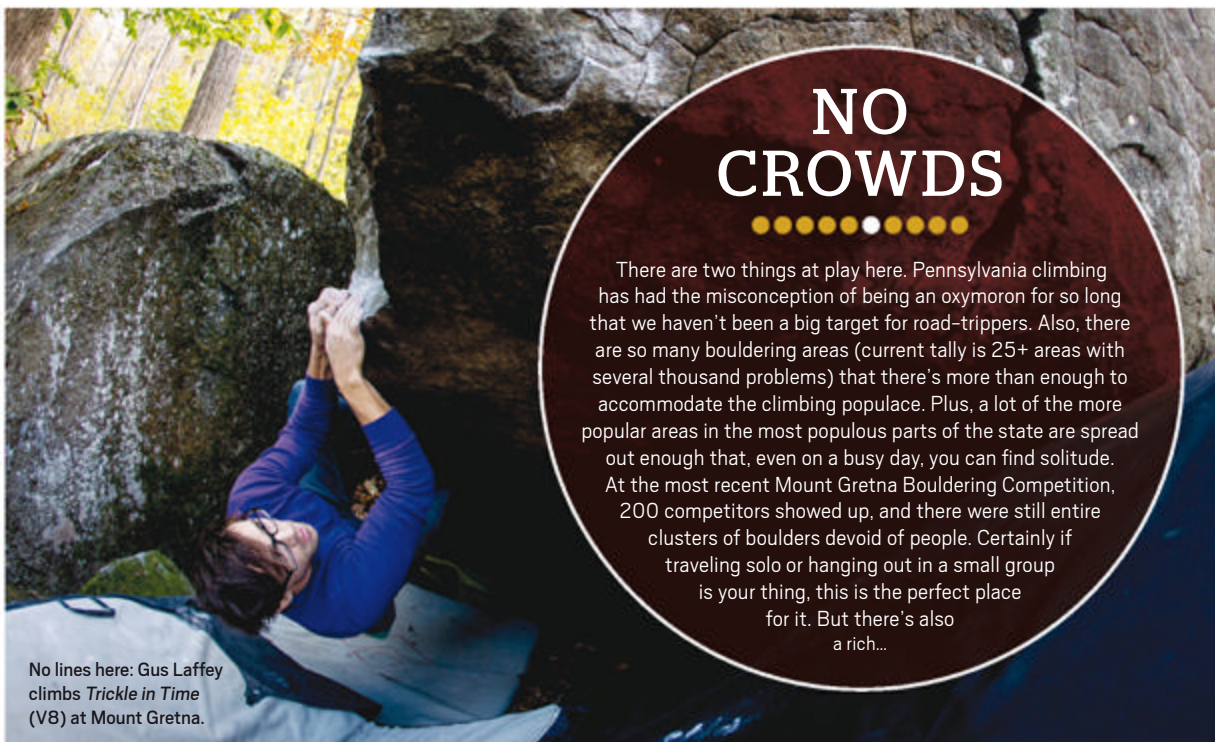
## EASY ACCESS



Dense forests aside, most of the established bouldering in Pennsylvania is a breeze to get to. So if trudging through head-high rhododendrons while dodging snakes and entire functioning societies of deer ticks isn't your thing, don't fret. There are areas here with the easiest approaches imaginable; just park the car, walk a couple feet, throw down the pads, peel open the guidebook, and get to climbing. Because we are (so far) pretty under the radar, often there are...

Kyle Stapp walks the easy and picturesque approach trail at Governor Dick Park.





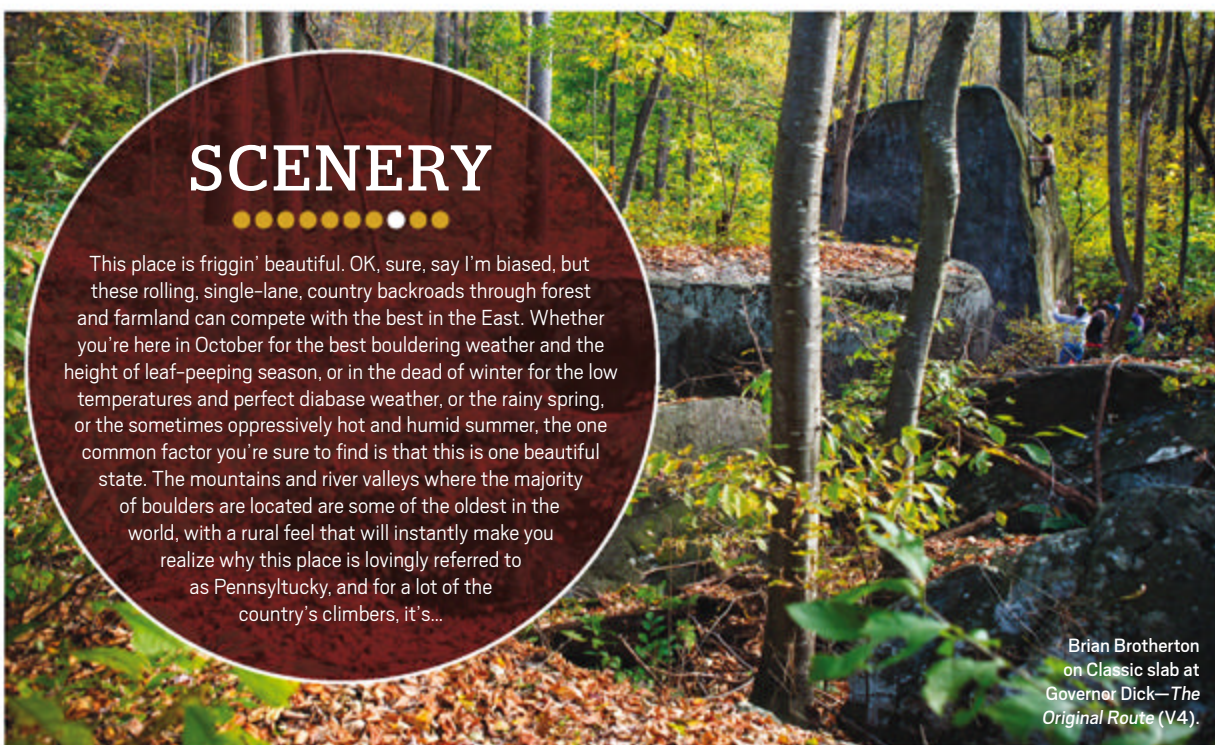
No lines here: Gus Laffey climbs *Trickle in Time* (V8) at Mount Gretna.

## NO CROWDS

There are two things at play here. Pennsylvania climbing has had the misconception of being an oxymoron for so long that we haven't been a big target for road-trippers. Also, there are so many bouldering areas (current tally is 25+ areas with several thousand problems) that there's more than enough to accommodate the climbing populace. Plus, a lot of the more popular areas in the most populous parts of the state are spread out enough that, even on a busy day, you can find solitude. At the most recent Mount Gretna Bouldering Competition, 200 competitors showed up, and there were still entire clusters of boulders devoid of people. Certainly if traveling solo or hanging out in a small group is your thing, this is the perfect place for it. But there's also a rich...

## Community

In spite of not having one mega-classic, household-name, go-to destination, or maybe because of it, the Pennsylvania bouldering community is among the most tight-knit, friendly, outgoing, and welcoming climbing communities in the country. I've spoken with numerous people who've moved west or south in search of bigger and better things, and without fail, the first thing they say is that they miss the PA community. We don't have a Red Rock or Yosemite or Eldo drawing thousands upon thousands of travelers from around the world, but if you find yourself out among one of our many world-class boulders and need some beta, a spot, or just someone to hang out with, you're sure to find a friendly face with whom you can enjoy the...



## SCENERY

This place is friggin' beautiful. OK, sure, say I'm biased, but these rolling, single-lane, country backroads through forest and farmland can compete with the best in the East. Whether you're here in October for the best bouldering weather and the height of leaf-peeping season, or in the dead of winter for the low temperatures and perfect diabase weather, or the rainy spring, or the sometimes oppressively hot and humid summer, the one common factor you're sure to find is that this is one beautiful state. The mountains and river valleys where the majority of boulders are located are some of the oldest in the world, with a rural feel that will instantly make you realize why this place is lovingly referred to as Pennsylvucky, and for a lot of the country's climbers, it's...

Brian Brotherton on Classic slab at Governor Dick—The Original Route (V4).



# Conveniently Located



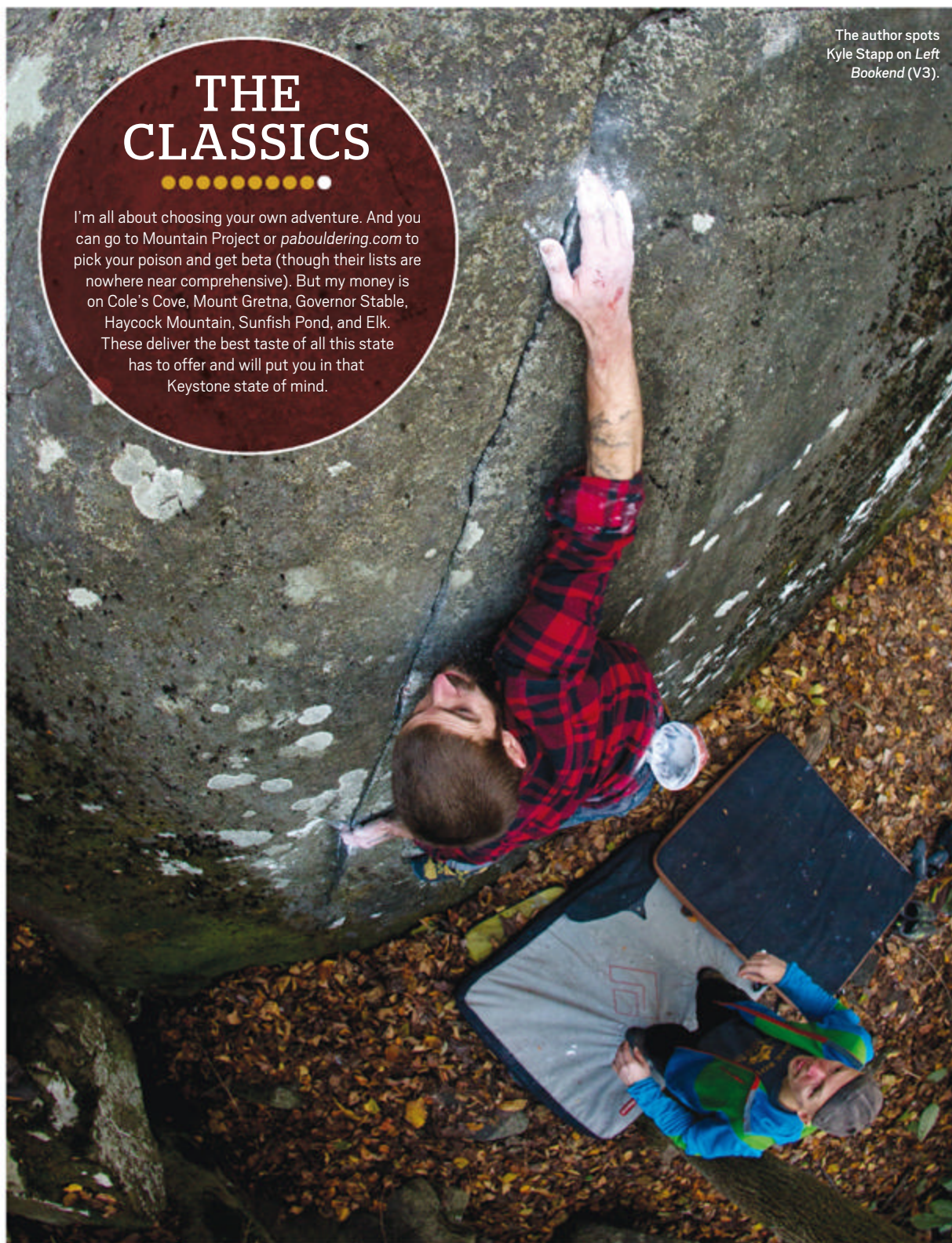
Smack dab in the middle of the East Coast Megalopolis, Pennsylvania climbing is within a day's drive of three-quarters of the population. There are international airports in Philadelphia, Pittsburgh, Harrisburg, and Scranton, and regional airports in many of the smaller cities spread throughout the state. I'd wager that wherever you land, you'll have at least a half-dozen areas on your menu. But if I were you, I'd target...

## THE CLASSICS



I'm all about choosing your own adventure. And you can go to Mountain Project or *pabouldering.com* to pick your poison and get beta (though their lists are nowhere near comprehensive). But my money is on Cole's Cove, Mount Gretna, Governor Stable, Haycock Mountain, Sunfish Pond, and Elk. These deliver the best taste of all this state has to offer and will put you in that Keystone state of mind.

The author spots  
Kyle Stapp on Left  
Bookend (V3).






# MARKETPLACE



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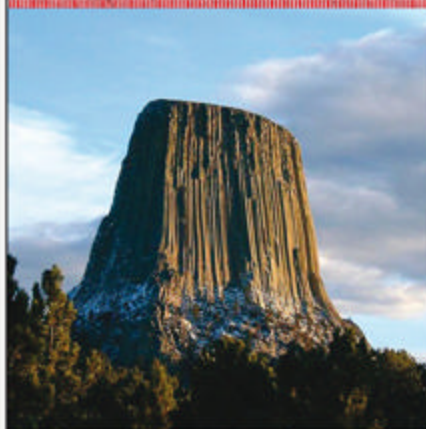
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5.14 REPRESENTS THE PINNACLE of our sport. Sure, there's 5.15 and someday there will probably be 5.16, but 5.14 separates the good from the great. It's the grade that puts you in the top 1% of climbers. You can't just be-tall your way past cruxes at this level. You need to have flawless technique, and you need to be really, really f\*\*\*ing strong, physically and mentally. Few ever achieve it. In fact, according to our reader survey (*Climbing* No. 331), the majority of climbers believe 5.12 will be the hardest they'll climb in their lifetime. But loftier grades are certainly possible with enough time and dedication. So why aren't you climbing 5.14? *Note to boulderers: Replace all instances of "5." with the letter V.*

```

graph TD
    Start([HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO CLIMB A 5.14?])
    
    Start --> Q1[No, because I can't climb 5.13.]
    Start --> Q2[Tried and failed.]
    
    Q1 --> A1[You can't know for sure unless you try! Go attempt a 5.14, then return to this flowchart. Did you send it?]
    Q2 --> A1
    
    A1 --> C1((Actually, no!))
    A1 --> C2((Actually, yes!))
    
    C1 --> Q3[Less than five years.]
    C1 --> Q4[Five years or more.]
    C2 --> A2[Of course you can't climb 5.14. Unless you're a 14-year-old wunderkind like Chris Sharma was, it takes years and years of work to reach that level. Keep at it and maybe someday you'll get there.]
    C2 --> A3[Well, look at that. You can climb 5.14. You just needed to believe in yourself. Now go find a sponsor.]
    
    Q3 --> Q5[Failing is the first step to succeeding. How long have you been climbing?]
    Q4 --> Q5
    
    Q5 --> A4[All the time. Unless it's too cold out, or too hot, or I'm feeling lazy, or there's something good on TV.]
    Q5 --> Q6[Some people climb for 60 years and never reach the top tiers of sport climbing difficulty. How often do you climb?]
    
    A4 --> A5[For you, climbing is a hobby, not an all-consuming beast that takes over your entire existence, which is totally fine! But it'll be hard to reach the highest grades unless you ditch other activities and dedicate your life to the sport.]
    Q6 --> A6[Four or more days a week, every week.]
    Q6 --> A7[Just climb whatever.]
    
    A6 --> Q7[And the rest of the time you're cross-training, eating healthy, and getting adequate sleep, right?]
    A7 --> Q7
    
    Q7 --> C3((Yes, but replace those things with drinking hard, eating cheeseburgers, and partying all night.))
    Q7 --> C4((My body is a temple made of lithe muscles.))
    
    C3 --> A8[It sounds like you could stand to increase your strength-to-weight ratio by making healthier life choices. Save the cheeseburgers for post-send celebrations, do less drugs, and you might have a shot.]
    C4 --> Q8[Describe your climbing routine.]
    
    Q8 --> A9[Pick a project above my current ability level that targets my weaknesses and work on that until I finish it.]
    A9 --> Q9[Hm. Do you train on a hangboard and/or campus board?]
    
    Q9 --> C5((No. That's boring. And hard.))
    Q9 --> C6((Yes. My forearms are bigger than my biceps. I am the real-life Popeye.))
    
    C5 --> A10[You need to challenge yourself more. Start by doing whatever the other answer to this question was.]
    C6 --> A11[It sounds like you're doing everything right. Give it more time and consider working with a coach to better target your weaknesses.]
  
```

**HAVE YOU EVER TRIED TO CLIMB A 5.14?**

No, because I can't climb 5.13.

Tried and failed.

You can't know for sure unless you try! Go attempt a 5.14, then return to this flowchart. Did you send it?

Actually, no!

Actually, yes!

Less than five years.

Five years or more.

Failing is the first step to succeeding. How long have you been climbing?

All the time. Unless it's too cold out, or too hot, or I'm feeling lazy, or there's something good on TV.

Some people climb for 60 years and never reach the top tiers of sport climbing difficulty. How often do you climb?

Four or more days a week, every week.

Just climb whatever.

Describe your climbing routine.

Pick a project above my current ability level that targets my weaknesses and work on that until I finish it.

Hm. Do you train on a hangboard and/or campus board?

No. That's boring. And hard.

Yes. My forearms are bigger than my biceps. I am the real-life Popeye.

Of course you can't climb 5.14. Unless you're a 14-year-old *wunderkind* like Chris Sharma was, it takes years and years of work to reach that level. Keep at it and maybe someday you'll get there.

Well, look at that. You can climb 5.14. You just needed to believe in yourself. Now go find a sponsor.

At your level, finger-specific strength training is going to go a long way. Suck it up and do it. It'll be worth it when you're high-fiving Adam Ondra after your first 5.14.

You need to challenge yourself more. Start by doing whatever the other answer to this question was.

It sounds like you're doing everything right. Give it more time and consider working with a coach to better target your weaknesses.

For you, climbing is a hobby, not an all-consuming beast that takes over your entire existence, which is totally fine! But it'll be hard to reach the highest grades unless you ditch other activities and dedicate your life to the sport.

And the rest of the time you're cross-training, eating healthy, and getting adequate sleep, right?

Yes, but replace those things with drinking hard, eating cheeseburgers, and partying all night.

My body is a temple made of lithe muscles.

It sounds like you could stand to increase your strength-to-weight ratio by making healthier life choices. Save the cheeseburgers for post-send celebrations, do less drugs, and you might have a shot.



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Bill Morse suits up for a larger than life burn on "California 5.12", a steep and thuggy 12c at Red Rock Canyon, Nevada Photo: Ben Moon





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